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From *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Šams al-maʿārif*: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam

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Abstract

In recent years, we have witnessed an efflorescence of research on Islamic esoteric traditions and occult thought. Such scholarly activity has established that the occult sciences are part of Islamic intellectual history that cannot be overlooked; rather, they constituted a primary mode by which people thought about the hidden, the extraordinary, and their potential for partaking in the divine and wondrous. Occult beliefs and practices are thus inextricably embedded in philosophical, scientific, and religious discourses. This article focuses on occult thought in medieval Islam (second-seventh/eighth-thirteenth centuries), particularly in its relation to the ways in which nature and the divine were perceived and experienced. I argue that medieval Islamic occult sciences distinguished themselves from forbidden *siḥr* or sorcery by identifying legitimate conditions of acquiring power on the basis of two differing paradigms: by association with natural philosophy on the one hand, and by association with Sufism on the other. A shift of emphasis occurred in the medieval period: from the second/eighth to the fifth/eleventh centuries, legitimisation of occult practices derived mainly from natural philosophy, stressing causation and knowledge of signs as the core principles of magical efficacy. By the seventh/thirteenth century, however, occult practices were increasingly justified on the basis of mystical and Sufi doctrines. During the first phase, magic was generally deemed natural, inasmuch as it functioned according to a causality proven empirically and understood rationally; during the second phase, the power of extraordinary acts, including magic, became the prerogative of a select group who has achieved non-rationalised revelation and theophany, which undermined natural causality and transformed signs from indicators of natural links into tokens of God and the spiritual agents mediating between Him and the gnostic. Scholars such as Pierre Lory, Constant Hamès, and Toufic Fahd have noted the difference between the magic of early Islam and that of the later Middle Period; however, this article elaborates on the epistemological transformations in this period and their implications for cosmological and ontological structures that had a direct impact on magical theory and practice.

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Keywords

Magic, astrology, occultism, natural philosophy, Neoplatonism, Sufism, Abū Maʿšar, al-Kindī, Ibn Masarra, *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm/Picatrix*, *Rasāʾil Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, *Sirr al-asrār*, *Šams al-maʿārif*, al-Būnī, Ibn al-ʿArabī

Résumé

Ces dernières années, nous avons assisté à une effervescence de la recherche sur les traditions ésotériques islamiques et la pensée occulte. Une telle activité académique a établi que l'occultisme fait partie intégrante de l'histoire intellectuelle islamique et ne saurait être négligée. Au contraire, l'occultisme est un des modes d'appréhension par lequel les individus pensent l'occulte, l'extraordinaire et leur potentiel pour participer au divin et au merveilleux. Les croyances occultes sont donc inextricablement intégrées aux discours philosophiques, scientifiques et religieux. Cet article se concentre sur l'occultisme dans l'Islam médiéval (IIe/VIIe-VIIIe/XIIIe siècles), en particulier dans sa relation avec les façons dont la nature et le divin ont été perçus et expérimentés. Je soutiens que l'occultisme islamique médiéval distingue les pratiques qu'il admet, du *siḥr* ou de la sorcellerie, tous deux interdits, en déterminant les conditions légitimes pour acquérir du pouvoir en se fondant sur deux paradigmes différents : par association avec la philosophie naturelle, d'une part, et par association avec le soufisme, d'autre part. Un glissement s'est opéré dans la période médiévale. En outre, du IIe/VIIIe au Ve/XIe siècle, la légitimation des pratiques occultes dérivent principalement de la philosophie naturelle, soulignant la causalité et la connaissance des signes comme principes fondamentaux de l'efficacité magique. Au VIIe/XIIIe siècle, cependant, les pratiques occultes étaient de plus en plus justifiées en s'appuyant sur les doctrines mystiques et soufies. Au cours de la première phase, la magie était généralement considérée comme naturelle, dans la mesure où elle fonctionnait selon une causalité démontrée de manière empirique et rationnelle. Dans la deuxième phase, le pouvoir des actes extraordinaires, y compris la magie, est devenu la prérogative d'un groupe restreint qui parachevait la révélation et une théophanie non rationalisée, ce qui fit reculer la causalité naturelle et transforma les signes d'indicateurs de liens naturels en marqueurs de Dieu et des agents spirituels intercédant entre Lui et le gnostique. Des chercheurs tels que Pierre Lory, Constant Hamès et Toufic Fahd relevèrent la différence entre la magie des débuts de l'islam et celle du Moyen Âge tardif. Cependant, cet article développe les transformations épistémologiques de cette période et leurs implications pour les structures cosmologiques et ontologiques qui eurent un impact direct sur la théorie et la pratique magiques.

Mots clefs

Magie, astrologie, occultisme, philosophie naturelle, néoplatonisme, soufisme, Abū Maʿšar, al-Kindī, Ibn Masarra, *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm/Picatrix*, *Rasā'il Iḫwān al-Ṣafā'*, *Sirr al-asrār, Šams al-maʿārif*, al-Būnī, Ibn ʿArabī

1 Astral and Natural Magic

The compendium known as *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* (*The Goal of the Sage*, aka *Picatrix*), among the most influential of premodern grimoires, epitomizes the earliest tradition of natural magic in Islam. Usually associated with the astronomer and mathematician Maslama l-Maǧrīṭī (d. *ca* 398/1008), this erroneous attribution was made by Ibn Ḫaldūn (d. 808/1406) and others.[1] Maribel Fierro convincingly identifies the author as the traditionist and occultist Maslama l-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964).[2] In the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, magic is an intrinsic part of wisdom which is the knowledge of "the distant causes—through which existing things exist—and of the existence of proximate causes of things […] which advance gradually toward The One […] He is the First in reality […] God the Exalted is the cause (*ʿilla*) of the world and the world is His effect."[3] Magic is thus "a divine power advanced by causes."[4] The intelligibility of causes underlies the magical theory of the *Ġāya*. Mediating between the First Cause (God) and terrestrial effects are the celestial bodies which act as instruments of generation and corruption; everything is composed by them and from them forms and life are received.[5]

1 Ibn Ḫaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. Darwīš Ǧuwaydī, Beirut, al-Maktaba l-ʿasriyya, 2000, p. 483, 507; see Mushegh Asatrian, "Ibn Khaldūn on Magic and the Occult," *Iran and the Caucasus*, 7/1 (2003), p. 97-99; David Pingree, "Some Sources of the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43 (1980), p. 1; Godefroid de Callataÿ and Sébastien Moureau, "Again on Maslama Ibn Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and Ibn Khaldūn: New Evidence from Two Manuscripts of *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*," *Al-Qanṭara*, 37/2 (2016), p. 329-372.

2 Maribel Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus. Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (d. 353/964), Author of the *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*)," *Studia Islamica*, 84/2 (1996), p. 87-112. Confirming the attribution of the *Ġāya* to al-Qurṭubī and the transmission of the *Rasā'il* by him, see Godefroid de Callataÿ, "Magia en al-Andalus: *Rasā'il Ijwān al-Ṣafā'*, *Rutbat al-Ḥakīm* y *Gāyat al-Ḥakīm* (*Picatrix*)," *Al-Qanṭara*, 34/2 (2013), p. 297-344.

3 Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix: Das Ziel des Weisen*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Leipzig, B.G. Teubner, 1933, p. 3-4. All translations herein are my own unless otherwise stated.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 7-6.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 81, 9, 284.

The motion of the celestial bodies affects generated minerals, plants, and animals,[6] influences the activity of all elementary bodies,[7] and causes "the tying of the higher nature to the lower natures."[8] They do so by means of their rays which fall upon the bodies of generated things.[9]

As a result of this connection between the world above and the world below, between causes and effects, it is necessary for occultists to be aware of astrological correspondences. Lists of correspondences are provided in the *Ġāya* such as those between colours, body parts, flavours, locations, animals, planets, minerals, stones, constellations, and planets.[10] Everything is inherently astral; occult properties (*ḫawāṣṣ*) are determined by the astral forms in generated things. Magicians, the author tells us, need to know and understand the properties "that issued from the moving planets, and these are known as *ḫawāṣṣ*."[11] They are active naturally or induced to efficacy magically: "*Ḫawāṣṣ* can do wondrous things on their own, such as the ruby's action as a repellent of plagues and others. And this can be done by a talisman […] through that which is deposited [in it as a result] of celestial proportions."[12] The term *ṭillasm* (talisman) is *musallaṭ* reversed which means "that to which power over something is conferred."[13] This power is the result of placing "celestial secrets" in its body;[14] it cannot be achieved without the astrological knowledge necessary to determine when and where to harness the forces of the planets and stars from which they receive their efficacy.[15] The author stresses that the "knowledge of celestial proportions is the foundation of talisman-making, as they [celestial bodies] diffuse their [talismans'] actions."[16]

These ideas of astral causation and the connection between all terrestrial things and the celestial world was articulated by the Arabic philosopher Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī (d. 259/873) and the Persian astrologer Abū Maʿšar al-Balḫī (d. 272/886), his protégé, one of the most influential authors on astral influences in the Middle Ages and the early modern period in both the Islamic world

6 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 99-100.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 81, 97, 294.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 150-156, 157-160.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 8-11.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and Europe.[17] To begin with al-Kindī, his letter entitled *al-Ibāna ʿan suǧūd al-ǧirm al-aqṣā* (*Explaining the Prostration of the Outermost Body*), was written as a response to the son of the Abbasid caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 218/833-227/842) who asked the philosopher to explain the meaning behind the Qurʾānic verse "the stars and the trees bow down" (Kor 55, 6).[18] Al-Kindī explains that the act of prostration here is not literal but indicates the stars' casting down influences to earth and being the efficient causes of the generation of all terrestrial things.[19] In another letter entitled *al-Ibāna ʿan al-ʿilla l-fāʿila* (*Explaining the Proximate Cause*), al-Kindī explains that the planets and their motions are the origin of everything that exists in the sublunar world.[20] However, it is the astrologer Abū Maʿšar who fully propounded the notion of the stars as efficient causes of generation and corruption. According to him, planets are the astrological signs of things to come because they are their efficient causes. In his *Kitāb al-Madḫal al-kabīr ilā ʿilm aḥkām al-nuǧūm* (*The Great Introduction to Astrology*), he writes: "The terrestrial world is connected with the celestial world and its motions by necessity. Due to the power of the celestial world and celestial motions, then, terrestrial things, generated and corruptible, are affected."[21] They are affected specifically by the heat from the motions of the celestial spheres and bodies, causing transformation—including corruption—among generated things.[22] This is a development of an Aristotelian concept found in *On Generation and Corruption* where the coming to be and passing

17 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1987, p. 196. The dates of Abū Maʿšar's birth and death are not certain due to discrepancies in several primary sources; see Charles Burnett, "Abū Maʿšar," *EI*[3].

18 *The Qurʾān*, transl. Ṭarif Khalidi, London, Penguin, 2008, p. 441.

19 Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, *al-Ibāna ʿan suǧūd al-ǧirm al-aqṣā*, in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī, Cairo, Dār al-fikr al-ʿarabī, 1950-1953, I, p. 245-247; al-Kindī, "The Prostration of the Outermost Body," in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, ed. Peter Adamson and Peter Pormann, Karachi, Oxford University Press ("Studies in Islamic philosophy"), 2012, p. 175-176.

20 Al-Kindī, *al-Ibāna ʿan al-ʿilla l-fāʿila*, in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, I, p. 224-226; al-Kindī, "On the Proximate Agent Cause of Generation and Corruption," in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, p. 164, 170.

21 Abū Maʿšar al-Balḫī, *Kitāb al-Madḫal al-kabīr ilā ʿilm aḥkām al-nuǧūm*, ed. Richard Lemay, Naples, Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1995-1996, II, p. 19.

22 *Ibid.*, II, p. 19-20; Adamson, "Abū Maʿshar, al-Kindī and the Philosophical Defense of Astrology," *Recherches de philosophie et théologie médiévales*, 69 (2002), p. 253-255. Al-Kindī also mentions that heat resulting from planetary motions is the agent (*ʿāmil*) of astral influences (al-Kindī, *al-Ibāna ʿan al-ʿilla l-fāʿila*, p. 224-226; al-Kindī, *al-Ibāna ʿan suǧūd al-ǧirm al-aqṣā*, p. 248-249; al-Kindī, "On the Proximate Agent Cause," p. 158; al-Kindī, "The Prostration," p. 177; Adamson, "Abū Maʿshar," p. 255).

away of things are attributed to the circular motions of the heavens.[23] In his *Meteorology*, Aristotle also conceives of elementary transformations as effects of the heat emitted by the celestial world.[24]

As a result of the existence of three co-principles of generation—matter, forms, and stars—Abū Maʿšar distinguishes between three types of natural properties (*ḫawāṣṣ*): material, formal, and astral.[25] Material properties are manifest in the various elemental composites and their qualities. The forms, united with matter through astral causation, provide the properties that are common to all members of the species. Astral forces provide the occult properties of species and determine the specific traits of each member.[26]

The author of the *Ġāya* probably knew Abū Maʿšar's *Kitāb al-Madḫal al-kabīr*, the likely source for his decan images.[27] The naturalization of magic in the *Ġāya* was supported by conceiving an astral origin to occult properties and the attribution of causality and efficacy to the stars. Another text that exemplifies this is *Kitāb al-Siyāsa fī tadbīr al-riʾāsa*, which purports to be an epistle from Aristotle to Alexander the Great offering political, moral, and dietary advice. The final part of the text, entitled *Sirr al-asrār*, is concerned with astral magic. The work itself claims in the proem to be a translation from Greek into Syriac then into Arabic by the translator Yaḥyā b. al-Biṭrīq, who flourished in Baghdad in the third/ninth century. But not enough evidence remains to indicate the existence of a Greek original.[28] The author echoes the theories concerning the

23 Aristotle, "On Generation and Corruption," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 554, 338a 19- 338b 1; Aristotle, "Physics," in *ibid.*, p. 342, 200b 12.

24 Aristotle, "Meteorology," p. 556-557, 339a 15-24, 340a 20-1.

25 Abū Maʿšar, *al-Madḫal*, II, p. 26-7.

26 Adamson, "Abū Maʿshar," p. 257-258.

27 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 58-59, 126-132; Abū Maʿšar, *al-Madḫal*, III, p. 372-389; Pingree, "Some Sources," p. 7; Živa Vesel, "Le *Sirr al-Maktūm* de Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī face à la *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*," in *Images et magie: Picatrix entre Orient et Occident*, eds Jean-Patrice Boudet, Anna Caiozzo and Nicolas Weill-Parot, Paris, Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2011, p. 81-85.

28 Pseudo-Aristotle, *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya li-l-naẓariyyāt al-siyāsiyya fī l-islām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Cairo, Maktabat al-nahḍa l-miṣriyya, 1954, p. 69. On the influence, circulation, and structure of this text, see Mario Grignaschi, "L'origine et les métamorphoses du *Sirr al-asrâr*," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 43 (1976), p. 7-112; *id.*, "La diffusion du *Secretum Secretorum* dans l'Europe occidentale," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 48 (1980), p. 7-70; *id.*, "Remarques sur la formation et l'interprétation du *Sirr al-asrâr*," in *Pseudo-Aristotle's The Secret of Secrets : Sources and Influences*, eds W.F. Ryan and C.B. Schmitt, London, The Warburg Institute, 1982, p. 3-33; Steven J. Williams, "The Early Circulation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian 'Secret of Secrets' in the West," in *Le scienze alla corte di Federico II*, Turnhout-Florence, Brepols-SISMEL

role of the stars in generation and corruption that we encounter in Abū Maʿšar and al-Kindī. He begins the chapter on magic with this assertion: "All the variation you see in the corporeal world […] and what is generated in it of minerals, plants, and animals is produced by means of the surrounding world […] that is its cause and governor. This means that all the terrestrial forms are ruled by the celestial, higher, and spiritual forms."[29] The stars and planets are "partners" in the composition of every mineral, plant, animal, and their occult properties.[30] This theory, according to the author, "is the foundation of the workings of talismans. The forms of the fixed stars and the seven planets […] are transferred into lower things, leading minerals, plants, and animals to accept their powers constantly."[31] He then adds that magical sigils or engraved forms correspond to celestial forms and establish the "connection with the celestial bodies and the reception of their rays which enable you to achieve or destroy what you wish."[32] Later the author explains that if one wishes to create a talisman, one needs to select the right material to correspond with the planet or configuration whose influence is desired, to choose the opportune time when the influence of that planet or configuration is most powerful, making sure Saturn is benign and ensuring that the rays are falling into the location of the operation. Sigils and symbols must be inscribed in order to channel astral influences into the body of the talisman.[33] This theoretical exposition is then followed by instructions for making various talismans, such as those for repelling snakes and scorpions and for pacifying a storm.[34] The *Sirr al-asrār* is mentioned twice in the *Ġāya* in reference to the importance of astrological elections in talisman-making and life generally.[35]

Celestial mediation is also discussed by Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ (Brethren of Purity), a tenth-century coterie of underground philosophers. They produced an encyclopaedic corpus on natural and occult philosophy and sciences called *Rasāʾil Iḫwān al-Ṣafaʾ* (*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*).[36] Their treatment of

("Micrologus", 2), 1994, p. 127-144; Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "The Pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb Sirr al-Asrār*: Facts and Problems," *Oriens*, 23-24 (1974), p. 147-257.

29 Pseudo-Aristotle, *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya*, p. 156.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 156-157.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

35 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 38, 78 (from Pseudo-Aristotle, *al-Uṣūl al-yūnāniyya*, p. 85).

36 Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus," p. 109.

celestial mediation greatly influenced the *Ġāya*.[37] In their *Rasā'il*, the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' adopt the peripatetic notion of celestial causation and reconcile it with Neoplatonic emanationism. They explain that the celestial bodies are the causes for the stability of the forms of species and genera in their bodies. They experience change and transformation due to the motion of the planets and stars. The celestial bodies are defined as "the instruments" (*adawāt*) of the Universal Soul which animates the world, propels the spheres, and produces the forms themselves.[38]

Astrology, the study of astral signs and causes according to the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', "is known by inference," which fact constitutes the major difference between it and *'ilm al-ġayb* (knowledge of the unseen) that only God is privy to and cannot be known by any act of intellectual prowess or deduction of causes.[39] In addition, astrology is foundational to magic, defined in the *Rasā'il* as "the outcome of the philosophical sciences."[40] According to Abū Ma'šar, mentioned by the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' in the *Rasā'il*, knowledge of astral causation and generation is obtainable in a discursive manner, by syllogism (*qiyās*), deduction (*istinbāṭ*), and verification by experience (*taǧrīb*). He writes:

37 In an alchemical work written by Maslama l-Qurṭubī entitled *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*, he claims to have contributed to the composition of the *Rasā'il*, and we find therein numerous borrowings from them. Holmyard considers these references to be later interpolations in his refutation of the ascription of the *Ġāya* to al-Maǧrīṭī and his acceptance of the date of its composition to be 1047-1051. David Pingree echoes Holmyard's conclusions. See E.J. Holmyard, "Maslama l-Majrīṭī and the *Rutbatu 'l-ḥakīm*," *Isis*, 6 (1924), p. 299; Pingree, "Some Sources," p. 2; Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus," p. 106. It was accepted that the *Rasā'il* were probably brought to al-Andalus by Abū l-Ḥakam b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kirmānī (d. *ca* 1075), but Fierro rather identifies al-Qurṭubī, author of the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, as the one responsible for their introduction. See Abū l-'Alā' 'Afīfī, "The Sources of Muḥyī l-Dīn b. 'Arabī's Sufi Philosophy," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo*, 1 (1933), p. 7; Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-'Arabī and the Isma'ili Tradition*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 29-30. Furthermore, the author of the *Ġāya* copies sections from the *Rasā'il* almost verbatim; for example, compare the definition of magic in al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 7-6 with Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il Iḫwān al-Ṣafā'*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 2008, IV, p. 314; also compare the significance of the moon in al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 67-70 with Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, IV, p. 335.

38 Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle* 15-21, ed. and transl. Carmela Baffioni, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 192, 356-357, 359-360.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 144, 153.

40 Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, IV, p. 284; Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *On Magic: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 52a*, ed. and transl. Godefroid de Callataÿ and Bruno Halflants, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 15-18.

> Many people thought that astrology is something stumbled upon by intuition and guesswork without having a sound origin with which to work or from which syllogisms can be made [...] and so we composed our present book to establish the judgements [of astrology] with convincing arguments and evidence [...] and whatever that is not there can be deduced by those who know the foundations of this practice.[41]

Here, Abū Maʿšar is establishing the epistemological principles of astrology based on Aristotelian paradigms of natural investigation.[42] He asserts that astrological knowledge begins with empirical evidence: "Most of the science of the judgements [of the stars] is manifest, visible, and clear, and that part not manifest is inferred by clear syllogism from the science of the nature of things and from the powers of the planetary motions manifest in this world."[43] The author of the *Ġāya* posits that magic must be understood in the same way. At the opening of the work, he asserts that it belongs to philosophy and the study of its secrets,[44] adding that "the outcome that we seek to unveil [viz. magic] could not have existed if it were not for the existence of wisdom [...] the fruit of syllogisms [...]. Understand this, for I have thus shown you a secret."[45]

Between the second/eighth and fourth/tenth centuries, then, occult philosophy pivoted on the intermediary function of the celestial world between God and the terrestrial world. Despite talking of stars as causes and signs, we must not understand the celestial dynamics to be mechanical. Vital and volitional agents transmit astral influences to the world below, which are called *rūḥāniyyāt*, spiritual powers. Abū Maʿšar explains that the stars and planets act "through their rational souls, by virtue of being alive, and through their natural movement [...] by God's leave."[46] This psychological element of Abū Maʿšar's astrological theory combines the Neoplatonic *anima* with the Stoic view that the cosmos is a network of causal channels through which the vivifying power

41 Abū Maʿšar, *al-Madḫal*, II, p. 4.

42 Richard Lemay, *Abu Maʿshar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century: The Recovery of Aristotle's Natural Philosophy through Arabic Astrology*, Beirut, American University of Beirut ("Silsilat al-ʿulūm al-šarqiyya", 38), 1962, p. 45.

43 Abū Maʿšar, *al-Madḫal*, II, p. 7. For Aristotelian parallels see Aristotle, "Physics," p. 315, 184a 10-13; Adamson, "Abū Maʿshar," p. 249.

44 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 1.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

46 Abū Maʿšar, *al-Madḫal*, II, 36.

of the *pneuma* flows.[47] These do not resemble intelligent entities traditionally understood as supernatural, such as jinn or demons.

In the Neoplatonic context, these souls are manifestations and multiplications of the power of the Universal Soul. In their *Rasā'il*, the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' explain that "the first power that flows from the Universal Soul towards the world is in the noble luminous entities that are the fixed planets and then after them [into] the moving planets."[48] They use the term *rūḥāniyyāt* to describe the localizations of this power in the planets, being the agency whereby planets influence the world below.[49] They write, "in the world there are spirits that are concealed to sensation. Their actions are apparent, whereas their essences are concealed; they are called spiritual beings (*rūḥāniyyīn*)."[50] These are linked to and interact with the terrestrial world according to two categories of behaviour; firstly, "by way of the natures of bodies [to which they are linked], as is reported in the books of astrology"; and secondly, by way of their souls and volition.[51]

According to the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', magic cannot be practiced without the astrological knowledge necessary for determining when the planets and their *rūḥāniyyāt* are in beneficial states. The author of the *Ġāya* likewise explains that the knowledge of natural-astral correspondences is essential for inviting the *rūḥāniyyāt* to invest a talisman or ritual with their powers.[52] He adds that we must prepare our spirits by means of theurgic rituals in order to communicate our will to the stars and their *rūḥāniyyāt*.[53] The powers of the celestial *rūḥāniyyāt* are infused in terrestrial things; consequently, incenses and other magical concoctions contain within them spiritual or *rūḥānī* powers.[54] It is notable that in magic these *rūḥāniyyāt* tend to be endowed with individuality and tangibility, appearing as persons and conversing with the operative mage, in contrast with the *rūḥāniyyāt* we encounter in the context of natural philosophy and astrology.[55] In the *Ġāya* we read:

47 Peter Struck, "A World Full of Signs: Understanding Divination in Ancient Stoicism," in *Seeing with Different Eyes: Essays in Astrology and Divination*, ed. Patrick Curry and Angela Voss, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 2007, p. 7-8; Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar*, p. 44, 106; Adamson, "Abū Ma'shar, al-Kindī, and the Philosophical Defense of Astrology," p. 247.

48 Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *On Magic*, p. 12-13.

49 *Id., Rasā'il*, IV, p. 339.

50 *Id., On Magic*, p. 91.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 120-121.

52 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 7, 10.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 38 -39, 49-50, 85-86, 171-179, 186, 286-291, 326-328, 344-347.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 215, 267.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

> The *rūḥāniyya* may appear in the spiritual world [of the magus] as a person who converses and teaches him what he desires, it may endear him to kings and sultans, tie and unravel any matter he wills [...] and respond to the caller with whatever he wants [...]. Talismans are the most powerful choice.[56]

Elsewhere, the author claims that the "wise man" receives his power from the *rūḥāniyya* that "strengthens, inspires him, and opens the gates of wisdom being connected to him by his high star [...]. Wise men and kings entered into covenants with this *rūḥāniyya* by means of prayer and [invocation of their] names." He follows this with a series of invocations using the names of such spirits or *rūḥāniyyāt*.[57] Nevertheless, the author largely adheres to the Neoplatonic ontology of these *rūḥāniyyāt* and insists that they are astral volitional forces that work by means of astral emanations. They constitute the first level of cosmic individuation of the Universal Soul.[58]

The Iḫwān al-Ṣafā"s elaboration on the *rūḥāniyyāt* and that of the *Ġāya* are directly derived from the pseudo-Aristotelian hermetic corpus. The pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica comprise a group of texts that take the form of epistles and conversations between Alexander the Great and Aristotle in which the philosopher discourses to his royal pupil on the workings of the universe, the forces within in, the hidden powers of nature, and magic. Aristotle bases his instructions on knowledge he has received from Hermes.[59] In the text called

56 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 47, 287-291.

59 Most of the texts that constitute the pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica are given strange Greek-sounding titles: *Isṭimāḥīs, Isṭimāṭīs, Išnūṭās, Istūṭās, Hadiṭūs*, and *Madiṭis*. The pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica includes a text with a more comprehensible title, *Kitāb Manāzil al-qamar* (*Book of the Lunar Mansions*), and another text containing instructions on attracting animals through four magical concoctions. The *Isṭimāḥīs*, the *Isṭimāṭīs*, the *Išnūṭās*, the text on attracting animals, and the *Hadiṭūs* all seem to have been grouped together in the manuscript tradition, as we see in London, British Library, Delhi Arabic MS 1946, most likely produced in the nineteenth century, and Oxford, Bodleian, MS Arab. 221, estimated by Beeston to be a fourteenth-century production (though according to its colophon, which he deems a corruption, it is an eleventh-century production); see A.F.L. Beeston, "An Arabic Hermetic Manuscript," *The Bodleian Library Record*, 7/1 (June 1962), p. 20-23. They both do include, however, *Ǧirnīs, Kitāb Hirmis fī manāfiʿ al-aḥǧār* (*Hermes' Book on the Benefits of Stones*), and *Kitāb ʿUṭārid b. Muḥammad al-Ḥāsib fī manāfiʿ al-aḥǧār* (*The Book of the Arithmetician ʿUṭārid b. Muḥammad on the Benefits of Stones*) which can be read in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2775. The *Ǧirnīs* is attributed to Hermes but does not feature Aristotle; it is concerned with the natural and occult

al-Istimāṭīs, the planetary *rūḥānīyyāt* are given names which also appear in the *Ġāya* as shown in the table below.[60]

Planet	Name	Top *Rūḥ.*	Bottom	Right	Left	Front	Back	Genus
Saturn	Bdīmās	Ṭūs	Ḥrūs	Qbūs	Donos/ Dryūs	Ṭāmlis/ Ṭāmis	Drūs	Ṭāhīṭrūs
Jupiter	Dmāhūs	Drmās	Dmṭus/ Mṭīs	Mʿs/ Mġīs	Drīs	Ṭmīs	Qdūs/ Frūs	Ḏndās
Mars	Dʿdyūs	Hāʿindīs/ Hāġīdīs	ʿndūs/ Ġīdyūs	Bmqrās/ Mġrās	Ardʿūs/ Ardġūs	Hndʿndīs/ Hndġyūs	Mhndās	Ḏndġās/ Ḏīdmās

Despite the personal names and prescribed invocations found in the texts mentioned so far, the *rūḥānīyyāt* must be perceived as tools that impel volitional forces to facilitate natural processes for the benefit of the operator. The *rūḥānīyyāt* are vital agents of the celestial world as multiplications of the Universal Soul. These must remain distinct from those (supernatural) beings, referred to as jinn and devils, who belong "to a mysterious world that cannot be seen, [and who] breed and die"; the author adds that Islamic law sanctions belief in these "fiery" creatures.[61]

properties of natural things alphabetically organized. It has been edited and studied by Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *Kitab Giranis: Die arabische Übersetzung der ersten Kyranis des Hermes Trismegistos und die griechischen Parallelen*, Munich, Herbert Utz Verlag ("Quellen und Forschungen zur antiken Welt", 43), 2004. ʿUṭārid b. Muḥammad is noted by Ibn al-Nadīm as an astrologer and astronomer; see Abū l-Faraǧ Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. and transl. Bayard Dodge, New York, Columbia University Press ("Records of civilization, sources and studies"), 1998, p. 658-659. In Paris, BnF, MS Arabe 2775, we read that ʿUṭārid was inspired to write his text on stones by a certain book of stones by Hermes. The *Isṭimāḥīs* appears with another text known as *Madīṭis* in Oxford, Bodleian, MS Marsh 556. The *Istūṭās* appears to have had an independent manuscript career as found in Paris, BnF, MS Arabe 2577 and a manuscript from Turkey, Manisa National Library, MS 1461 (copied 771/1369). *Kitāb Manāzil al-qamar* can be found in London, British Library, MS Or. 5591 (copied in 876/1462).

60 London, British Library, MS Delhi Arabic 1946, ff. 33r-53r (ff. 40r-42v); al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 223-235.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 178, 181. Jinn are supernatural beings created from fire and mentioned in the Qurʾān. They are described as being morally accountable, and, like humans, created to

Surprisingly, the *Ġāya* lacks any instructions for receiving aid from subjugating jinn and devils. The Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ too explicitly differentiate between them and celestial souls. They explain that there are two kinds of spirits. First, those not attached to bodies; if they are good they are angels, if they are bad they are devils and jinn. Second, those "attached to the bodies of the planets [...] having an influence on the world in two types of influence, one of which is through the elements of their bodies as delineated in the book on astrology, and the other through their souls."[62]

The foundations of al-Qurṭubī's and the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ's astral magic are firmly founded on precepts borrowed from natural philosophy (subsuming astrology), and specifically a Neoplatonised form of Aristotelianism that reconciles semiological, causal, and volitional modes of knowledge. Magic in the abovementioned works is the understanding of causes—physical, astral, pneumatic—and their utilisation to direct desired effects. This belongs to an epistemological stance which regards the development of knowledge about the terrestrial and celestial worlds to be achieved by reasoning and intellection, processes that observe effects and deduce their causes, which can lead to knowledge about the First Cause, God.

2 Intersections

Natural philosophers and ascetics both aimed to know God: the first group through His created world (effects), and the second group through the renunciation thereof. At the time when al-Kindī and Abū Maʿšar wrote their works, Sufism as a consolidated and institutionalised way of knowing, thinking, and living did not exist. Extreme pietistic and ascetic practice was pursued by certain isolated individuals who renounced the world and its pleasures and adopted a strict sense of self-scrutiny and observance of obligatory and

worship God (Kor 51, 56). The evil amongst them are devils and Iblīs (Lucifer) himself was a jinn (Kor 18, 50). In regionally diverse folklore, jinn are considered shape-shifters who often interfer in human affairs. See Joseph Henninger, "Beliefs in Spirits among the Pre-Islamic Arabs," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, p. 1-53; Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2009; Robert Lebling, *Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar,* London, I.B. Tauris, 2010; Pierre Lory, "Anges, djinns et démons dans les pratiques magiques musulmanes," in *Religion et pratiques de puissance*, ed. Albert de Surgy, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997.

62 Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, IV, p. 244-245.

supererogatory worship.[63] Most famous among them is al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 109/728) who promoted preaching, exhibiting penance and mortification of the flesh to a small group. To this group belonged ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. *ca* 132/750), who believed that God imparted esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm bāṭin*) to those who dedicated their lives to Him.[64] No intersection can be discerned between the worldview of such individuals and the philosophically oriented milieu to which al-Kindī and Abū Maʿšar belonged.

A classical form of Sufism began to emerge in the third/ninth century in Basra, Baghdad, Syria, and Egypt.[65] Affiliated to the Baghdadi school of asceticism was Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), whose contemplation of the esoteric significance of Qurʾānic letters and words was influential, as we shall see below.[66] From Egypt hailed Ḏū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/860), who advocated asceticism and the search for divine knowledge through occupying oneself with God and renouncing the material world.[67] He was associated with Ǧābir b.

63 Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, Leiden, Brill ("Themes in Islamic studies", 1), 2000, p. 6-7; Christopher Melchert, "Origins and Early Sufism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, New York, Cambridge University Press ("Cambridge companions to religion"), 2015, p. 12-13.

64 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 10, 16-18; Melchert, "Origins," p. 13-14.

65 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 14, 35, 48; Melchert, "Origins," p. 13.

66 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 86. A non-Sufi lettrist tradition existed before the third/ninth century, especially in the esoteric Shīʿī context. Exponents of this early formulation include al-Muġīra b. Saʿīd (d. 119/737) and Abū l-Ḫaṭṭāb (d. *ca* 137/755). A lettrist tradition may have first emerged among second- and third-/eighth- and ninth-century Shīʿī *ġulāt* (extremists) which developed into a mystical science during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries due to the systematisation of Sufism. Many Sufi texts containing mystical and metaphysical speculations on letters were produced from the third/ninth century onwards, including those of Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāǧ (d. 309/922), but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to summarize the history of the lettrist tradition. See Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 69-71; William Tucker, "The Kūfan Ghūlāt and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements," in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism, and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Leiden, Brill ("Islamic history and civilization", 105), 2014, p. 188-189; Mushegh Asatrian, "An Early Shīʿi Cosmology: *Kitāb al-ashbāḥ wa l-aẓilla* and Its Milieu," *Studia Islamica*, 110 (2015), p. 8, 67; Pierre Lory, "Soufisme et sciences occultes," in *Les voies d'Allah: les ordres mystiques dans l'islam des origines à aujourd'hui*, eds Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein, Paris, Fayard, 1996, p. 186-189.

67 Michael Ebstein, "Ḏū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī and Early Islamic Mysticism," *Arabica*, 61 (2014), p. 559-612.

Ḥayyān and reputed to have dabbled in astrology, alchemy, and magic.[68] This reputation, however, is merely anecdotal.[69] As we have seen, the *Sirr al-asrār* was produced during this period, but it betrays nothing of the Sufi worldview, while, on the other hand, the *Risālat al-ḥurūf* falsely attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī contains small but significant "magical" elements subsumed under an Islamic mystical and cosmological framework, into which rudimentary notions of emanationism are reworked.[70]

Pseudo-Tustarī explains that the letters in God's speech are the primordial foundations of all created things. They constitute the spiritual forms that emerge from God's engendering fiat, "Be!" As such, they are "the true essence of the thing that comes into being."[71] This is the first dimension of God's power of creation achieved "by speech"; the other dimension is "by action," which causes bodies to emerge from water. In combination, a thing—body and form/soul—comes into existence.[72] God encompasses all beings through his Divine Names, or "the attributes with which the Creator, exalted be He, described Himself." The power of speech is called a "book" as it delineates the nature of all created beings and as such becomes the Book of Creation, the macrocosmic counterpart to the book of divine revelation, the Qurʾān.[73] From the light of the nine noblest letters (Ā, L, Q, Ḥ, N, M, Ṭ, R, Ṣ) the nine spheres emerged:

68 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 41; Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-ḥurūf* (*Epistle on Letters*) Ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in al-Andalus," *Journal Asiatique*, 299/1 (2011), p. 227; Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus," p. 92, 97.

69 Ebstein, "Ḏū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī," p. 592-594.

70 The authenticity of this text has been questioned. Pilar Garrido Clemente views it as a compilation and edition possibly created by al-Tustarī's disciples, while asserting that it does contain elements reflected in al-Tustarī's authentic works; Pilar Garrido Clemente, "Estudio y edición de la *Risālat al ḥurūf* del sufí Sahl al-Tustarī (con traducción de la sección sobre Yāʾ-sīn y de los pasajes de su *Tafsīr* que tratan de las letras)," *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes*, 19 (2008), p. 72-73. Ebstein and Sviri consider the attribution to al-Tustarī "highly questionable" seeing that "such [an] esoteric-occult and mythical philosophical orientation" is clearly at odds with al-Tustarī's known teachings; Ebstein and Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*," p. 215. Despite these reservations, the text remains an important work, particularly for this article, as its doctrines are clearly reflected in the works of Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. *ca* 622/1225) discussed at length here as a key representative and even formulator of an "Islamicized" magic in the seventh/thirteenth century. See Clemente, "Estudio y dición," p. 74; Ebstein and Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*," p. 234; Jean-Charles Coulon, *La magie islamique et le corpus bunianum au Moyen Âge*, PhD thesis, Université Paris IV—Sorbonne, 2013.

71 Ebstein and Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*," p. 253.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 235-236.

the seven heavens, the Pedestal (*al-kursī*) and the Throne (*al- ʿarš*). Together with the letters K, H, Y, ʿ, S—"invested with beauty and splendour" by the noblest letters—they make up the fourteen mysterious letters known as *fawātiḥ* found at the beginning of 29 suras of the Qurʾān.[74] The Pedestal is referred to in the Qurʾān: "His Pedestal extends over the heavens and earth" (Kor 2, 225). God's Throne is also described in the Qurʾān as being carried by angels (Kor 20, 5; 69, 17).

Here we have an Islamic cosmological narrative that differs from the Peripatatic theories of generation and corruption adopted by Abū Maʿšar, al-Kindī, the Iḫwān al-Ṣafaʾ, the *Ġāya*, and the *Sirr al-asrār*. However, while the *Risālat al-ḥurūf* is not magical in orientation, one passage alludes to an operative, even talismanic, application: "When a human being wishes to bring out a secret contained within his hiddenness, he may do this either by choosing letters whose substance is air, and then it will become a saying or speech; or, if the substance is ink, it will become a book with physical and observable form."[75] By speech or by writing, a human being is capable of generating an effect according to a purpose determined by the soul; perhaps the first implies invocations and the second sigils and symbols that we encounter in the works of Aḥmad al-Bunī (d. *ca* 622/1225 or 630/1232-1233), discussed below, whose theoretical underpinnings are largely derived from Sufi sources, including the *Risālat al-ḥurūf*.

The *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* and the *Rasāʾil* of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ were produced during a time when Sufism was undergoing a consolidation due to the increased production of texts on Sufi doctrines, exemplified by the works of al-Qušayrī (d. 465/1072) and al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), as well as biographical dictionaries that document the edifying and inspiring lives of Sufi masters, as we find in the works of Abū Saʿīd b. al-Aʿrābī (d. 341/952) and Ǧaʿfar al-Ḫuldī (d. 348/960). Crucially, Sufism also spread to al-Andalus during this period.[76]

The *Ġāya* and the *Rasāʾil* can be described as propounding mystically-flavoured philosophy. The mystical aspects, however, are essentially non-Islamic; they rather derive from the Neoplatonic esoteric conceptions found in the *Theology of Aristotle*, an Arabic adaptation of Porphyry's edition of Plotinus's *Enneads* IV-VI made by al-Kindī's translation circle in Baghdad.[77] The Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ subscribe to the Neoplatonic cosmic hierarchy, though they do refer

74 *Ibid.*, p. 237-238.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

76 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 121-123, 125-128, 130-132; Melchert, "Origins," p. 19-21.

77 Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle*, London, Duckworth, 2002, p. 6-8.

to the eighth sphere of the fixed stars as God's Throne and the totality of the spheres as God's Pedestal.[78] The path of ascension to the divine in these two texts is a vertical and gradual one. It requires directing the rational soul away from the physical world towards the emanative hypostases (the Universal Soul and the Universal Intellect), thus imbuing it with radiance from the higher worlds; this process ultimately exposes the primordial ideas in the Universal Intellect, allowing the seeker to achieve a state of cosmic awareness.[79] The divinisation of the soul is achieved through knowledge (*ʿilm*) of causes and reasons (*al-asbāb wa-l-ʿilal*), which is the essence of alchemy, magic, medicine, astrology, and "the science of emancipation" (*ʿilm al-taǧrīd*) by which the soul knows its essence. As a result, the soul's eye or insight is opened and it knows the truths and verities of all beings.[80] However, it must be stressed that the soul's exaltation is star-centric rather than God-focused.[81] In a chapter entitled "On the emancipation of the soul and its longing for the celestial world," using a language that is firmly Neoplatonic, the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' write:

> If the person of intellect and understanding looks into the science of the stars and contemplates the breadth of these spheres, the speed of their revolutions, the greatness of these planets, the wonders of their motions, and the parts of the Zodiac and their strange descriptions, as we have described before, his soul longs to ascend to the spheres and to observe what is there with scrutiny; but it is not possible [for the soul] to ascend to what is there with this heavy and gross body. Indeed, when the soul departs from this body and is not hindered by base actions, corrupt opinions, the accumulation of ignorance, or the degradation of its morals, it is [able to be] there in the blink of an eye, timelessly, because it is [already] there, [the place] where its resolve and beloved [are], in the same way the soul of the lover [resides] where the beloved is.[82]

The same conception of the divinisation of the soul is expressed in the *Ġāya*.[83] The soul of the seeker connects with the celestial spheres and from there

78 Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *On the Natural Sciences*, p. 75, 78.

79 ʿAbd al-Raḥman Badāwī, *Aflāṭūn ʿind al-ʿarab*, Cairo, Maktabat al-nahḍa l-miṣriyya, 1955, p. 22, 62-64.

80 Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *On Magic*, p. 13-17.

81 Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, III, p. 269-275.

82 *Ibid.*, I, p. 137.

83 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 291.

launches into the higher hypostases.[84] This is achieved by the powers of the rational soul—described as light instilled by God—honed through empirical understanding, moral awareness, and suppression of desire.[85] In addition to knowledge of astrology and the sympathies among natural things, this elevation of the soul is one of the preconditions of magical practice.[86]

The intersection of *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* with a *bāṭinī* (esoteric) tradition has been discussed in relation to the attribution of its authorship to Maslama l-Qurṭubī. According to Fierro and Sviri, al-Qurṭubī's travels to the east, particularly his studies with Sahl al-Tustarī's pupil Ibn Salīm al-Tustarī in Basra, and the possibility of an encounter with Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. Masarra (d. 319/931), exposed him to both Andalusian and eastern Sufi traditions.[87] Concerning Ibn Masarra, Addas sees in him a precursor "of an Andalusi mysticism which was to reach its high point with Ibn ʿArabī two-and-a-half centuries later," although Knysh contends that Ibn Masarra is "outside the mainstream Sufi pale."[88] What needs to be noted is that his works demonstrate an affinity with Neoplatonic thought connected with the philosophy of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ and the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, as Stroumsa and Sviri stress.[89] According to Ebstein and Sviri, Ibn Masarra and Ibn ʿArabī are both affiliated to the "Andalusian Sahl" stream which is more esoteric, symbolic, and Neoplatonic than mainstream eastern Sufism, a distinction which leads them to question the attribution of the aforementioned treatise on letters to the real Sahl al-Tustarī whose other works are less esoteric.[90] However, when we consider the content of the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm,* it appears to have very little that can be considered esoteric/*bāṭinī*/symbolic in a Sahlian or Masarran (lettrist) way despite the permeation of Neoplatonic ideas. In one place, the Qurʾān is described as containing both exoteric and esoteric aspects. The author mentions the *fawātiḥ* whose meaning is esoteric and represents

84 *Ibid.*, p. 37-38, 333.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 289-294.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

87 Fierro, "Bāṭinism in al-Andalus," p. 99, 104-105; Godefroid de Callataÿ, "Philosophy and Bāṭinism in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra's *Risālat al-iʿtibār* and the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 41 (2014), p. 263, 299-300.

88 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 114; Claude Addas, "Andalusi Mysticism and the Rise of Ibn al-ʿArabī," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Leiden-New York-Köln, Brill ("Handbuch der Orientalistik. 1. Abt., Der Nahe und der Mittlere Osten", 12), 1992, p. 918.

89 Sarah Stroumsa, "Ibn Masarra and the Beginnings of Mystical Thought in al-Andalus," in *Mystical Approaches to God: Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Peter Schaefer, Munich, Oldenbourg ("Schriften des Historischen Kollegs", 65), 2006, p. 97-112: p. 101-2, 107-11.

90 Ebstein and Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-ḥurūf*," p. 214, 227.

the soul; the rest of the letters are exoteric, representing the body.[91] This is followed by a list of the suras of the Qurʾān and their planetary associations, which the author claims were drawn from the *Kitāb al-Maḫzūn* of a certain Ǧaʿfar al-Baṣrī. We are told that this schema belongs to the category of secrets "God placed in the hearts of His friends (*awliyāʾ*), people of intellect (*ʿuqalāʾ*), and gnostics (*ʿārifīn*)."[92] In a passing comment, he mentions the Sufis who use the Greatest Name of God to produce wondrous effects in the world. The author then claims to have written a treatise on this subject.[93] Beyond these elements, however, one struggles to find a distinctively *Islamic* mystical tradition reflected in the practical and theoretical contents of the *Ġāya*.

In contrast with the *Ġāya*, Ibn Masarra's *Kitāb Ḫawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* is concerned with "the science of [Divine] Names and attributes." It is a "private science between the heart of a human being and his Lord."[94] Referring to Sahl al-Tustarī, Ibn Masarra asserts that letters are the foundations of creation.[95] The cosmos can be comprehended by the soul and heart of an individual by approaching the letters, names, and *fawātiḥ* as symbols representing cosmological and cosmogonical principles that encapsulate God's direct powers of creation and generation. Ibn Masarra syncretises this "Islamic" cosmogony with Neoplatonic emanationism. Existents are divided into four classes: God, who is "distinct from [created] things"; the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-kullī*), which "contains divine virtues (*faḍāʾil*)"; and the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kulliyya*), "which occupies primal matter," that is, the body of the world it "carries." The celestial spheres were set up by the Universal Soul and the Whole received warmth from it. The fourth and final existent is Nature.[96] The radiance from the name *Allāh* forms the essence of the Intellect; the radiance from the name *al-Raḥmān* (Most Compassionate) is the essence of the Universal Soul; and from the name *al-Raḥīm* (Most Merciful) the body of the world (Nature) emanates. Ibn Masarra writes:

91 The Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ also refer to the *fawātiḥ* as mysteries that puzzled exegetes and others who tried to interpret them; Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, III, p. 378-9; Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 107.

92 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 169-175.

93 *Ibid.*

94 Garrido Clemente, "Edición Crítica del *K. Jawāṣṣ al-Ḥurūf* de Ibn Masarra," *al-Andalus Magreb*, 14 (2007), p. 61.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 62-63.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

> From the *ulūhiyya* [*Allāh*] with *al-Raḥmān* [and] with *al-Raḥīm* you know that the Universal Intellect is consumed with the Universal Soul and that the Universal Soul is consumed with the body of the world, this according to the school (*maḏhab*) of the philosophers and the erring ancient nations to whom no prophet was sent (*ahl al-fatarāt*), who attained the knowledge of *tawḥīd* in the absence of prophecy. Yet their knowledge thereof is in accordance with the [Divine] Names, although prophecy explicated and demonstrated it in a far clearer and more conclusive manner.[97]

Neoplatonism provided the cosmological stratification which can be utilized in the soul's ascent, even providing the bases for the graded praxis of self-divinisation. As Ibn Masarra writes in his *Risālat al-iʿtibār*, "this world and all its creatures [form] a ladder which the contemplators climb up towards the highest of God's grand signs (*āyāt*). He who ascends, ascends from the bottom to the top. They ascend by elevating their intellects from their lowly rank up to the grand signs where the attributes of prophets reach."[98]

Ibn Masarra exhibits an elementary knowledge of Neoplatonic emanationism, first established in the Islamic world through the *Theology of Aristotle*, which became a common element of mystical thought by the time of Ibn Masarra.[99]

Furthermore, the post-Fatimid Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonised cosmology arguably contributed to the overall Islamicisation of the cosmological-cosmogenical world-view of the fourth/tenth century.[100]

In comparison, though the cosmological framework of the *Ġāya*'s content is primarily Neoplatonic, any reading of it will immediately show that it is alien to the tradition to which many have claimed it belonged based on its authorship. The sources of the *Ġāya* are Greek, Sabean, Nabatean, Indian, etc., and its magic is astral-natural without reference to letter magic or a Sufi cosmology. Surveying the content of the *Ġāya*, it seems that al-Qurṭubī had stronger leanings towards the traditions of astral magic based on natural philosophy that

97 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

98 Pillar Garrido Clemente, "Edición Crítica de la *Risālat al-Iʿtibār* de Ibn Masarra de Córdoba," *MEAH, Sección Árabe-Islam*, 56 (2007), p. 92.

99 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 114.

100 Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, p. 223-224. Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 79; see Clemente, "Edición Crítica de la *Risālat al-Iʿtibār*," p. 99-100; Daniel De Smet, "Ismāʿīlī Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 313-324; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, p. 133-134.

thrived in the East; he was also inspired by the *Rasā'il* of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' and their magical ideas. The lettrist conception of pseudo-al-Tustarī and Ibn Masarra set the foundations for a more revelatory application of letters that, as we shall see, informs the magic of Aḥmad al-Būnī, who systematised their instrumentalisation. The most obvious difference between letter magic and the astral/natural magic found in the *Sirr al-asrār*, the *Ġāya*, and the *Rasā'il* is that the magic in these three texts is explained by the astral agency which connects the celestial world to the natural world and is manipulated by the operator. Letter magic, by contrast, is revelatory and depends on the capacity of the operator to receive divine knowledge through contemplating and meditating on the letters as universal principles and signs indicating the divine dimension from which all creation singly emerged. Simply put, the magic of the aforementioned three texts cannot be conceived of as Islamic as it is based on a metaphysical exposition that is essentially Hellenistic—Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, Pythagorean and Stoic—according to which creation occurs by means of celestial efficient causes. In the *Risālat al-ḥurūf* and all the Sufi-oriented texts we have dealt with in this section, however, it is stressed that God does not need causes to create. In other words, creation is an act of direct divine effusion; hence we encounter a universe whose cosmogenic principles are divine utterances that become the fabric and essence of creation and the created.

3 From Mind to Heart

We have seen in the previous section how the early mystical texts emphasized the superiority of revelatory knowledge to intellectual knowledge. The former requires re-orienting the soul towards the Divine through concentrating on signs or token of the Divine rather than effects through which the causes are inferred. These tokens are the letters which make up Divine Speech through which the universe is constructed; therefore, knowledge of the letters reveals the emanative and volitional structure of the universe. This revelatory shift is not only ontological but also epistemological, as the registration of signs/letters and their interpretation depend on a different faculty of realisation. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) and the Greatest Master Muḥyī l-Dīn b. ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) articulated this ontological and epistemological re-orientation more fully and systematically than their predecessors. As we shall see, their expositions fed directly into ideas about the instrumentalisation of letters (lettrist magic).

Al-Ġazālī's *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* is largely concerned with the legitimate means of knowing and accessing the Divine. Early in the text, he cautions that this

access cannot be achieved without strict religiosity. Accordingly, salvation is attained through two levels of experience: the level of praxis (*muʿāmala*) and the level of unveiling (*mukāšafa*), which is "the knowledge of the hidden (*bāṭin*)."[101] He stresses that his own tome is dedicated to the first as the second should not be divulged in books even if it is the goal of many.[102] The level of praxis itself is divided into *ẓāhir* (manifest) which is undertaken through outward adherence to the divine law, and *bāṭin* (hidden) which is reached through the "actions of the heart." The manifest is the principle of *islām* (submission) and the hidden is that of *īmān* (faith).[103]

Al-Ġazālī is promoting what we can refer to as "revelatory bāṭinism," in contrast to the "intellectual bāṭinism" that we encounter in al-Kindī who, as noted above, engages in an exegetical exercise that subordinates the Qurʾān to natural philosophy and reads it through an intellectual lens.[104] Hidden phenomena and causes can be understood through intellection and reason; this is the epistemological foundation of texts such as the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* and the *Rasāʾil Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. In the former, al-Qurṭubī briefly explains the meaning of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* phenomena respectively; the first is received from the faculty of imagination processing sensory input, whereas the second relies on the mind's ability to form inferences (*istidlālāt*); thus, his bāṭinism is markedly different from al-Ġazālī's and Ibn ʿArabī's, who insist that rational inferences cannot lead to true knowledge of things hidden. Furthermore, al-Qurṭubī uses the word *bāṭin* to describe the internal senses as distinct from the five external ones.[105] The notion of having five external senses—sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touch—as well as internal senses is established by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), for whom the internal senses are the common sense, imagination, estimation, thinking, and memory. These make up the cognitive ability of human beings and they can be applied for *bāṭinī* understanding or *ẓāhirī*/

101 Abī Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, Beirut, al-Maktaba l-ʿaṣriyya, 2007, 1, p. 30.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 23, 116.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

104 Al-Ġazālī's revelatory bāṭinism constitutes a subtle layer of the overarching objective of *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*: the demotion of *kalām* and *fiqh* in favour of the revelatory experience of truth; see Kenneth Garden, "Al-Ghazālī's Contested Revival: *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* and Its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib," PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, December 2005, p. 6-7, 16, 20-27, 51.

105 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 333.

external purposes, which correspond with metaphysical inquiry and physical/natural inquiry respectively.[106]

In contradistinction, the nexus of revelatory bāṭinism for al-Ġazālī becomes the heart and its capacity to receive revelation. In a chapter entitled "On the explication of the heart's wonders" (*Kitāb šarḥ ʿaǧāʾib al-qalb*), we encounter his epistemological typology in which the heart, spirit, and soul are defined. Each of these has physical and inner aspects. The heart is the fleshy organ itself but it is also "a spiritual divine subtle power (*laṭīfa*) which has an attachment to this corporeal heart." It is not possible to articulate the nature of this attachment because it is related to the level of *mukāšafa* which, he here repeats, is not the concern of his book, and because it requires revealing the secret of the soul, which one is not permitted to reveal; however, this subtle power represents "the quiddity of being human."[107] Moreover, it is what gives a human being "the preparedness to know God […] for the heart is the knower of God."[108] Concerning the spirit, on the one hand it is the medical vaporous substance that issues forth from the heart; on the other, it is also a subtle power (*laṭīfa*) that is "knowing and aware" and it is categorised as one of the secret workings of the heart. As for the soul, it may refer to the affected soul, in the Aristotelian sense, whose actions are necessitated by the body. This is the soul for whose subduing the Sufis call. However, the soul is also a subtle power (*laṭīfa*) identified as the ipseity of being human which facilitates knowing God.

From this description of the subtle powers (*laṭāʾif*), it becomes clear that the functions of the spirit and soul are subordinated to and contained within the heart.[109] This focalisation leads al-Ġazālī to completely bypass the intellect, as is evident from the two descriptions he provides for it: it is the "knowledge of the truths of things, making it a description of the knowledge located in the heart." It is "that which receives knowledge, and so it is the heart, I mean particularly the subtle power (*laṭīfa*)."[110]

The intellect, that is, is not an independent faculty dedicated to intellection and deductive processes. The intellect *is* the heart. Referring to Sahl al-Tustarī, al-Ġazālī explains that the heart is the microcosmic *ʿarš* (Throne)

106 Peter E. Pormann, "Avicenna on Medical Practice, Epistemology, and the Physiology of the Inner Senses," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 102-106.

107 Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, II, p. 4.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

and the chest is the *kursī* (Pedestal), establishing a parallel between the epistemological hierarchy and the Islamicised Neoplatonic ontological hierarchy discussed above.[111]

This heart-centred, non-discursive, and revelatory way to the Divine was also propounded in the treatise known as *Fī l-farq bayn al-ṣadr wa-l-qalb wa-l-fu'ād wa-l-lubb* (*On the Difference between the Chest, the Heart, the Kindling Heart, and the Core*), attributed to the third/ninth-century Sufi master al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḏī. It is stressed in this text that "the knowledge of the *bāṭin* is the knowledge of the heart, and it is the [most] useful science."[112] He unpacks the functions of the different concentric constituents of the heart: the outer layer is the forefront or bosom of the heart (*ṣadr*), and locus of the waystation of *islām*.[113] The second layer is the heart (*qalb*), which actualises the waystation of *īmān* and is the locus where *bāṭini* inclinations are first ignited.[114] The third layer is the kindling heart (*fu'ād*) where theophany and visions are received as signs of the realisation of the waystation of *iḥsān* (perfection).[115] *Islām, īmān*, and *iḥsān* refer to levels of belief from the following hadith in which the angel Gabriel/Ǧibrīl asks the Prophet Muḥammad:

> "What is *īmān*?" God's Messenger replied, "*Īmān* is to believe in God, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection." He asked, "What is *islām*?" God's Messenger replied, "To worship God Alone and none else, to offer prayers, to pay the obligatory charity (*zakāt*), and to fast during the month of ramaḍān." He asked, "What is *iḥsān* (perfection)?" God's Messenger replied, "To worship God as if you see Him, and if you cannot see Him then [knowing] that He is seeing you."[116]

These three stages of belief became spiritual waystations in Sufi tradition. Al-Ġazālī, as we have seen, discusses the first two, perhaps refraining from the third considering it to belong to *mukāšafa*. Al-Tirmiḏī, however, adds a fourth:

111 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

112 Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī l-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḏī, *Bayān fī l-farq bayn al-ṣaḍr wa-l-qalb wa-l-fu'ād wa-l-lubb*, Amman, Mu'assasat Āl al-Bayt al-malakiyya li-l-fikr al-islāmī, 2012, p. 31.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 18, p. 53.

116 Al-Buḫārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book 2, Hadith 43 (https://sunnah.com/bukhari/2/43).

emancipation, which is localized in the final, innermost constituent of the heart, the core (*lubb*), where the Divine is truly witnessed.[117] The path to God requires a re-channelling from a rational and intellectual occupation to the affective cultivation of internal resolve, directing the will toward the Divine—God, the Truth—from whom the light of true knowledge shines into the heart. Indeed, al-Tirmiḏī emphasizes that the mind's "dominion is deficient," although it is beneficial up to a point, adding that it is bound by language—linear reasoning—which cannot reach and articulate an authentic mystical experience. As a result, "not every person of intellect (*ʿāqil*) knows God, but every knower of God is a person of intellect."[118] This is in contrast with Iḫwān al-Ṣafā"s statement above according to which any "person of intellect" is able to know the Divine through the study of astrology and contemplation of the cosmos and the series of causes and effects that governs it.[119]

For al-Ġazālī, as long as orthopraxy is maintained, when the heart's subtle powers are properly engaged contemplating the Divine, the truths behind everything known will be reflected on it and it shall be like a mirror.[120] Therefore, the heart witnesses God "if the veil is lifted through devoutness (*taqwā*), and whoever has the veil between him and God lifted, the image of the *mulk* (creation) and *malakūt* will manifest in his heart."[121] The *malakūt* comprises the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) in which existents first come to be before corporeality, and the angelic realm.[122] This manifestation, according to al-Ġazālī, takes place at the deepest point of the *bāṭin* level of *īmān* (faith) accessed only by gnostics (*ʿārifīn*), not "the faith of the common people" which is "pure imitation," and not "the faith of intellectual theologians (*mutakallimūn*) which is intermingled with a kind of inference."[123] Gnostics experience revelation (*ilhām*)—these are the *awliyāʾ* (the friends of God)—and rational theologians engage in rational consideration (*iʿtibār*)—these are the *ʿulamāʾ* (people of exoteric and rational knowledge). As a result of this unveiling and manifestation, the gnostic may attain *karāmāt* (extraordinary feats) such as visions.[124]

Al-Ġazālī thus gives the *bāṭin* a prominent place in this heart-centric scheme of knowledge. We can therefore say that two of the most important

117 Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḏi, *Bayān fī l-farq*, p. 57-58.
118 *Ibid.*, p. 60, 62.
119 See p. 313, footnote 82.
120 Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, II, p. 17.
121 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
122 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
123 *Ibid.*, p. 20-21.
124 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

achievements of al-Ġazālī's *Iḥyā'* are cementing "esoteric" concepts within "exoteric" adherence, and re-orienting the process of perception. He is careful not to abandon the *ẓāhir* (manifest) and deductive processes—which take place at the level of the heart still—to ensure the legitimacy of his episteme. Al-Ġazālī writes: "if the *bāṭin* contradicts the *ẓāhir*, this is the nullification of Islamic Law (*šarʿ*) [...] whoever says that the Truth contradicts Islamic Law or that the *bāṭin* contradicts the *ẓāhir*, this is closer to apostasy than to faith."[125] It must be remembered that this whole scheme is still contained within the level of *muʿāmala* not *mukāšafa* as he continuously stresses; furthermore, the structure of his exposition is itself formal and deductive—a feature that Ibn ʿArabī explicitly critiques.

Ibn ʿArabī exhibits a thorough acquaintance with *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*), which is a text he presents as the articulation of a revelation he received during hajj. *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* was recited to Ibn ʿArabī by Muḥammad b. Ḫālid al-Ṣadafī l-Tilimsānī.[126] For Ibn ʿArabī, the methods of al-Ġazālī put him in the milieu of rational theologians who side-track the *bāṭinī* project.[127] If al-Ġazālī is cautious in his text not to divulge the secrets of attaining theophany, Ibn ʿArabī reveals it all.

Ibn ʿArabī accepts al-Ġazālī's stance that favours revelation as being centred on the heart. He differs from al-Ġazālī, however, in revealing *mukāšafa* in his book and exposing the operational aspects of Islamic gnosis. Ibn ʿArabī echoes the dichotomy of physicality and "the subtle powers" (*laṭā'if*) in human existence that al-Ġazālī applies to the heart, soul, spirit, and intellect. For Ibn ʿArabī there are two anatomical sciences: physical and divine. The first is known by physicians, and the second—the one that al-Ġazālī refuses to discuss since it belongs to *mukāšafa*—involves, according to Ibn ʿArabī, "knowing the Divine Names and Divine relationships in the human form."[128]

Ibn ʿArabī, like al-Ġazālī, stresses that this true knowledge cannot be obtained by intellectual or rational theorisation (*naẓar fikrī*) but only through a divine unveiling; it can never be an "objective" endeavour.[129] The *bāṭin*,

125 Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 140.

126 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiya*, VIII, p. 387.

127 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 479; VII, p. 156.

128 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 417.

129 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abū l-ʿAlā' ʿAfīfī, Cairo, Dār iḥyā' al-kutub al-ʿarabiyya, 1946, p. 49, 51; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. xii, xiii, xiv; *id.*, "Ibn al-ʿArabī," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, London, Routledge ("Routledge history of world philosophies", 1), 1996, p. 501-502.

according to Ibn ʿArabī, is knowledge attained by the heart.[130] In the *Futūḥāt,* he declares that true knowledge is "an achievement of the heart" through which the Divine Presence is revealed and is reflected on it, like a mirror. The heart that is "occupied with the knowledge of causes apart from God" is like a rusty mirror.[131] Ibn ʿArabī explains, in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, that the preoccupation with causality seen in those rational thinkers and their incapacity to reach the truth without a discursive approach to the world's phenomena are signs of spiritual weakness. The gnostics, however, see things beyond the linearity of rationality and causality; they witness that the world is God's divine effusion.[132] In the *Futūḥāt*, we are told that this knowledge is not based on inferences, proofs, and syllogisms, as Abū Maʿšar, al-Kindī, and the author of the *Ġāya* would have it.[133] Instead, the gnostic seeks *dalā'il*, tokens placed by God in the world, for which the heart's eye searches to learn the soul's identity in relation to the Divine.[134] The world, Ibn ʿArabī tells us, is not bound by causality (*asbāb, sababiyya*), and thus not rationally comprehensible, but truly witnessed only via the divine principles we know as the Divine Names which are made manifest to the hearts of those who observe the tokens that point to God and signify His nearness.[135] In his *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm* he explains that the heart itself performs the creative fiat "Be! And so it is," but on a scale appropriate to its microcosmic domain. In other words, its creative ability in a state of spiritual sublimation and witnessing the divine (*mušāhada*) is a refraction of God's own command. The agency here is entirely God's. This leads Ibn ʿArabī to posit the heart as "the possessor of *himma*," that resolve which enables the subjugation and utilisation of the exterior world and the achievement of extraordinary feats.[136]

Ibn ʿArabī explicitly rejects the notion of astral causation and the celestial bodies' mediation in creation, since God does not need instruments: "'Be!' He says, 'and it is'" (*kun fa-yakūn*).[137] As discussed below, it is the celestial Prophetic souls that move the planets and rule existents by divine sympathy which cannot be understood through reason and syllogisms, for it is a secret

130 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 122-125.

131 *Id., al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 142-143.

132 *Id., Fuṣūṣ*, p. 49, 185, 187.

133 *Id., al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 94.

134 *Id., Fuṣūṣ*, p. 53, 105.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 105; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 3, 6-8.

136 Ibn ʿArabī, *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm wa-maṭāliʿ ahillat al-asrār wa-l-ʿulūm*, Beirut, al-Maktaba l-ʿaṣriyya, p. 121.

137 *Id., Fuṣūṣ*, p. 115; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. xix.

knowledge revealed through revelation and theophany. Letters and the Divine Names, not celestial bodies/causes, are the generating principles. Each name realises an aspect of the world's existence.[138] And so diversity and multiplication are achieved solely through the names, which are God's self-manifestations.[139] God's names are "divine ratios"—as opposed to the "celestial ratios" mentioned in the *Ġāya*—that vary in aspect but not in essence, functioning as degrees of God's own effusion.[140] In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabī stresses that causes of creation belong to the supercelestial dimension of God and not to the stars and planets. Elsewhere, he affirms that "God does not create a thing with a thing," denying proximate causality (*al-sababiyya*).[141] Multiplicity is in the One without dividing Him; His Divine Names (which are codified by letters) produce the universe and the variations it contains while maintaining His Unicity.[142] In affirming that "God does not create a thing with a thing," Ibn ʿArabī is here arguing against the philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā, who postulate that another created entity, namely the Intellect, generates the world with all its variation and multiplicity, since they believe "only the one issues from the One"; this generating entity thus becomes an efficient instrumental cause.[143]

This is indeed Ibn Sīnā's position, who defines metaphysics as a divine science "whereby the first causes of natural and mathematical existence and what relates to them are investigated; and [it also investigates] the Cause of Causes and Principle of Principles—namely, God, exalted be His greatness."[144] He also adds: "In Him there is no variety of forms arranged and differing, such as there is in the human soul, in the sense previously discussed in *Psychology*. For this reason, He intellectually apprehends things all at once, without being rendered multiple by them in His substance […]. Rather, their forms emanate from Him as Intelligibles."[145] The Pure Intellect emanates separate intellectual agents into which it instils the universal ideas that act as archetypes of generated forms: "To each sphere belongs a separate intellect whose relation to it is as the relation of the active intellect to us."[146] The multiplicity of forms—which cannot be in God—occurs in these separate intellects, "helped by a difference

138 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 235-41.

139 *Id., Fuṣūṣ*, p. 65, 101, 104, 105-106, 119.

140 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

141 *Id., al-Futūḥāt*, VI, p. 91.

142 *Ibid.*, I, p. 153-157; VI, p. 110-111; Chittick, "Ibn al-ʿArabī," p. 499.

143 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, VI, p. 91-92; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 16-17.

144 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, transl. Michael E. Marmura, Provo, Brigham Young University Press, 2005, p. 2.

145 *Ibid.*, p. 291.

146 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

in the states of the celestial spheres." The forms thus emanate from the separate celestial intellects. The Active Intellect, the last in the emanative order, bestows forms on matter, thereby producing the world of generation and corruption, but it does so "by the association of the celestial influences."[147] Ibn Sīnā here reconciles Neoplatonic emanationism with Aristotelian hylomorphism and incorporates the theory of astral causation first established by Abū Maʿšar—a theory Ibn ʿArabī considers reprehensible, since "God's creation cannot be given causes (*lā yuʿallal*)"; it is only accomplished by His command. This stance is reiterated in most of Ibn ʿArabī's works, including in an admonishing letter he wrote to the philosopher and occultist Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) criticizing his intellectual bāṭinism.[148]

In contrast to Ibn Sīnā, Ibn ʿArabī seems to formulate what we can describe as "lettrist hylomorphism." The four natures are "Primary Mothers" (*ummahāt*) and from them the elements are born; however, the mothers are antipathetic to each other and yet in generation they join in physical compositions. The Creator chooses to harmonize them according His omniscience and divine preconception. They do not actually exist separately in essence but emerge by the will of God as harmonized compositions. So, the mothers/verities exist in God and not independently in reality; they do not have actual existence before their formal composition. These formal compositions are the elements and they can undergo transformation. The principles of generation are the letters and divine names which constitute the Divine Speech and attributes. They generate by spontaneous effusion rather than by a multiplication and serialisation of causes.

Ibn ʿArabī clearly sees in this an alternative to Aristotelian hylomorphism, which explains the actualisation of existence as a collaboration of the four causes: formal, material, efficient (the celestial world), and final causes. Ibn ʿArabī tells us that he did not come upon this from his "readings in the science of the natures according to its advocates"; rather, he was introduced to it by a friend who initially was busy receiving medical education but discovered the truth of generation "through *kašf* (a state of revelation) not through reading and deductive reasoning". He declares: "This is an astonishing secret, and an abstruse complexity which is forbidden to reveal since it cannot be borne and since the mind cannot comprehend it; but only *kašf* can witness it."[149]

147 *Ibid.*, p. 329-330, 334-335.

148 Mohammed Rustom, "Ibn al-ʿArabī's Letter to Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: A Study and Translation," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 25/2 (2014), p. 113-137.

149 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 91-2.

Ibn ʿArabī, thus, fully elaborates on the revelatory aspects of Islamic bāṭinism that al-Ġazālī was careful to restrict. In revelatory bāṭinism, the cosmos must undergo "a subjective polarisation" whereby the universe is valued as a network of signs to be contemplated by the human subject in order to know God through His attributes.[150] Although such relativity and hermeneutic potential have always been the presumption underlying the astrology and magic we see in Abū Maʿšar, Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, and Maslama l-Qurṭubī, for Ibn ʿArabī the cosmos's essential characteristic is its relativity to the human and ultimately to God; a relation that cannot be understood causally but semiologically, namely through the letters and Divine Names.

4 Science of Letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*)

We find a proto-lettrist theory already in the corpus attributed to the enigmatic and semi-legendary Ǧābir b. Ḥayyān (d. 159/815), who has existed in historical consciousness as a prolific author on alchemy and natural sciences since the second/ninth century. The elusiveness of authenticity characterizes the treatises dealing with magic, artificial generation, properties of things, and numbers.[151] In his *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd, Kitāb al-Mawāzīn al-ṣaġīr, Kitāb al-Mīzān al-ṣaġīr*, and *Kitāb al-Aḥǧār*, the real characteristics of everything—minerals, plants, animals, stars, and souls—and their manipulation can be understood by the Science of the Balance of Letters (*mīzān al-ḥurūf*). This science investigates the way in which alpha-numerical values are integral to and reflect the essence and nature of things. Once thereby determined, one may then transform these natures.[152] However, it must be emphasized that this is a reason-motivated

150 Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn al-ʿArabī*, transl. Bulent Rauf, Paris, Beshara Publications, 1977, p. 10.

151 Syed Nomanul Haq, *Names, Natures and Things: The Alchemist Jābir ibn Ḥayyān and His* Kitāb al-Aḥjār (Book of Stones), Dordrecht, Kluwer ("Boston studies in the philosophy of science", 158), 1994, p. 3-14; Paul Kraus, *Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam. Vol. I: Le corpus des écrits jābiriens*, Cairo, Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1943.

152 Haq, *Names, Natures, and Things*, p. 81-83; Denis Gril, "La science des lettres," in *Les Illuminations de La Mecque: Textes Choisis*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, Paris, Sindbad ("La Bibliothèque de l'Islam. Textes"), 1989, p. 414-415; Pierre Lory, "La magie des lettres dans le *Šams al-maʿārif* d'al-Būnī," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*, 39-40 (1987-1988), p. 103; *id.*, *La Science des Lettres en Islam*, Paris, Dervy, 2004, p. 41-42.

pursuit, "known by proof" (*maʿlūm bi-l-burhān*)[153] that uniquely elaborates on the Aristotelian notion of the actualisation of existents; it is an aetiological morphology, rather than a revelatory and purely semiological one.

Discussion of the significance of letters can also be found in the *Rasāʾil* of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, who consider them, in addition to numbers, as intellectual principles and denotations of universal order. However, their discussion is akin to the Pythagorean and Platonic, specifically Timaean, mathematical cosmology.[154] Epistemologically, these principles are understood by intellectual and causal modes of knowing; the section discussing letters and numbers opens with the statement, "Know that whoever wishes to know the truth of things must first look for the causes (*ʿilal*) of existents and the reasons (*asbāb*) of the created."[155] This epistemological stance markedly distances the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ's world-view from that of Ibn ʿArabī, who rejects causality as means of knowing the realities of existence and the Divine. The incorporation of Neoplatonic emanationism in the thought of Ibn ʿArabī led some studies to argue for a direct influence of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ but there is no evidence, textual or conceptual, that Ibn ʿArabī was directly influenced by them as ʿAfīfī and others argued.[156] However, it is most likely that Ibn ʿArabī absorbed Neoplatonic notions from their prevalence in the intellectual atmosphere in the Islamic west. Furthermore, as we have seen, the cosmogony and cosmology of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ are structured according to a causal worldview which gives prominence to the intermediation of the celestial spheres in generation and their role in establishing cosmological coherence. Their cosmology is a part of natural philosophy based on a Neoplatonised Aristotelianism, in contrast to the Sufi world-view that perceives the universe and its processes as direct disclosures of the Divine.

Ibn ʿArabī clearly was acquainted with the Ǧābirī Balance of Letters. Like Ǧābir, Ibn ʿArabī viewed letters as the principles of celestial and supercelestial motions.[157] They also have "dominion [from] the higher world over the lower world."[158] However, he "esotericises" this science consciously by explicitly linking it with Ǧābir's alleged mentor, Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (the sixth Shīʿī Imam)[159]

153 Ǧābir b. Ḥayyān, *Rasāʾil Ǧābir b. Ḥayyān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2006, p. 200-203, p. 208.

154 Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, III, p. 377-383; I, p. 48-77.

155 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

156 Chittick, "Ibn al-ʿArabī," p. 498-499; ʿAfīfī, *The Sources*, p. 20-27.

157 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 85-86.

158 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

159 Gril, "La science des lettres," p. 414-415, 407-408.

with whom divination and the science of letters were closely associated.[160] Ibn ʿArabī thus downplays the "intellectual" aspect of the science of letters. For Ibn ʿArabī, the letters reflect divine verity, not natural status, and they codify the subordination of human beings or the Human Presence to the Divine presence. The human's relationship to the Divine and its cultivation are mediated by the letter-essences of the universe's spheres.[161]

The most peculiar aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's lettrist theory, however, is his description of the letters as "nations addressed and accountable, and among them [there are] prophets of their kind. They have names whence they are and no one knows this save the people of unveiling."[162] They have spirits (*rūḥānīyya*), even personhood, and we read in the *Fuṣūṣ* that each letter is associated with a Divine Name that has power over the created the world.[163]

Knowledge of the letters and their spiritual forces brings about gnostic, magical, and miraculous abilities. In the *Futūḥāt al-makkīyya*, Ibn ʿArabī condemns extraordinary feats achieved by "natural tricks" (*ḥīla ṭabīʿīyya*).[164] It is possible that he came across the *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, but strong evidence is lacking; however, he was certainly acquainted with the *Sirr al-asrār*, as it forms the basis of his work *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhīyya*; and it has been suggested that its discussion of physiognomy (*firāsa*) inspired his own pursuit of the matter.[165] But in the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabī seems to criticise magicians who claim to receive the powers of higher souls, or celestial *rūḥānīyyāt*, in the manner found in the *Ġāya* and the *Sirr al-asrār*. He describes them as "those who believe themselves to

160 Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, p. 121 (see also n. 151).

161 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 87-89.

162 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

163 *Ibid.*, p. 123-124; Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 72.

164 Ibn ʿArabī often avails himself of "magical" terms but discards what they designate transitively, using them rather as symbols of gnostic concepts or processes. For example, in the *Futūḥāt* he uses the word *ṭillasm*, and, exactly like the author of *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, he understands it in terms of its reverse *musallaṭ* meaning to have power over something. But in the section where he describes three talismans he is rather referring to the states or modes of living that prevent human beings from experiencing truth and enlightenment. They are 'talismans' that God imposed on common people; only Sufis can free themselves from their effects; see Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, V, p. 343-349. Another example of Ibn ʿArabī's inversion of magical terms is found in the *al-Tadbīrāt al-ilāhīyya* where he uses the term *ḫawāṣṣ al-aḥǧār*, usually designating the occult properties of stones, to refer to traits or powers of the gnostic's heart that enable him to achieve different levels of consciousness or awareness of the Divine; see Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Tadbīrat al-ilāhīyya*, ed. ʿĀṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī, Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2003, p. 103-106.

165 *Ibid.*, p. 20; Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn al-ʿArabī between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism': 'Sufism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other'," *Oriens*, 31 (1988), p. 25.

be only receiving [power] from the higher spirits (*arwāḥ ʿulwiyya*), and [think] that they supply them [with power], and [that] they attract them [*i.e.* the spirits] to bind them and that all they are [engaged] in is derived from them [...]. Such are worshippers of created beings, not worshippers of God."[166] Legitimate occult powers, however, are much nobler than this. We read:

> Divine secrets flowing into the world are supplied by the high spirits to the righteous souls who are open to the gains from the [higher] world in this life. They are [derived as a result of] spiritual states [articulated] by the tongues of people who have freed their souls from the slavery of desires and the apprehension of nature, and cleaned the mirrors of their hearts until the higher souls approached them. Thus, they joined, with their thoughts, the Heavenly Host (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*).[167]

To understand the difference between the high spirits (*arwāḥ*) that Ibn ʿArabī valorises and the celestial *rūḥāniyyāt* of the *Ġāya* and the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā"s *Rasāʾil*, we must digress slightly to understand the discrepancy between the structures of the spiritual world as described by both camps.

As we have seen, the celestial *rūḥāniyyāt* of the *Ġāya* are multiplications of the Universal Soul as described in the *Theology of Aristotle*; they are the vital principles or emanations that govern and administer the celestial and terrestrial worlds.[168] In the cosmos of Ibn ʿArabī, however, the Neoplatonic hypostases are "islamicised," resulting in a different ontological status.[169] Ibn ʿArabī implies that the spirit of the Prophet Muḥammad (*rūḥ al-rasūl*) is identical to the Universal Soul which administers all generation.[170] The spirits of the rest of the Prophets (*rūḥāniyyat nabī*) reside in the celestial spheres and each of them corresponds with a set of sciences, among other things. It is indeed, as Chittick calls it, a prophetic cosmology and any revelation to the Friends of God is mediated by the spirits of the prophets.[171] This brings to mind the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā"s view of sacred history. In *al-Risāla l-ǧāmiʿa*, they introduce the seven historical epochs which correspond to the seven prophets, though without reference to the *rūḥāniyyāt*. This scheme is reminiscent of Ismāʿīlī *adwār* or

166 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v, p. 345.

167 *Ibid.*, p. 346.

168 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 47.

169 Pierre Lory, "Magie et religion dans l'œuvre de Muhyi al-Dîn al-Bûnî," *Horizons maghrébins*, 7-8 (1986), p. 6-7.

170 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 220.

171 Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. xiii, xiv; Chittick, "Ibn al-ʿArabī," p. 499.

cycles according to which the sixth era is that of Muḥammad as *nāṭiq* (revealing the exoteric aspect of religion) with ʿAlī as *waṣī* (disclosing the esoteric aspect), and in the seventh era Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl (who has gone into concealment) becomes the *nāṭiq-waṣī*-imam.[172] In Epistle 38, the allegory of the king's seven sons (prophets) and the fact that the characteristics of five of them correspond to the natures of five planets can be read as another layer to their view of sacred history that associates the planets with the prophets.[173] The Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ do not substitute the *rūḥāniyyāt* (which originated in the pseudo-Aristotelian, however, Hermetica) with the prophets. Their *rūḥāniyyāt* sit firmly in the cosmological scheme of volitional causality. The most explicit planet-prophet association is still found in Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt*, perhaps inspired by the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ.[174] He explains that through communicating with the *rūḥāniyyāt* of the spheres, more specifically those of the prophets, the gnostics receive many secret sciences, which include knowledge of talismans, divination, and the secrets of Divine Names.[175]

TABLE 1 *From Ibn ʿArabī's* Futūḥāt*: three examples of prophetic and lettrist correspondences*

Spirit	Letter	Sphere	Day	Knowledge
Idrīs (Hermes)	N	Sun	Sunday	The secrets of the spirits, light, celestial music, instruments
Jesus	Ṭ	Mercury	Wednesday	Inspiration, revelation, worship, invention, divination, talismans, magic, amulets
Adam	D	Moon	Monday	Secret names

172 Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *al-Risāla l-ǧāmiʿa*, ed. Ǧamīl Ṣalībā, Damascus, al-Taraqqī, 1949, II, p. 145-154; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, New York, New York University Press, 1993, p. 83; Godefroid de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa': A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2005, p. 42-43; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, p. 131-133.

173 De Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa'*, p. 48-49.

174 For parallels between Ibn ʿArabī and the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, see Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus*, p. 53-57, 136-138.

175 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 236-239.

Ibn ʿArabī also asserts that individuals are bestowed with various "miracles" or "charismas" (*karāmāt*) as they journey through spiritual grades. He elaborates on the waystations—or grades (*marātib*)—of *islām*, *īmān*, and *iḥsān* in his *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm*.[176] He defines a miracle as "violating the norm" (*ḫarq al-ʿāda*). Its purpose is "so that God can make the worshipper witness His wonders and make him see in His signs what will increase in him the desire for his waystation and the force [of determination] toward that which he is heading."[177] These *karāmāt* are achieved through a force called *himma*, which is a resolve propelled by love of God. Ibn ʿArabī defines it as a psychic power (*quwwa nafsiyya*) that is directed by God toward a supernatural effect and/or revelation.[178] In the *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm, karāmāt* are divided according to the senses through which they manifest. Belonging to the *karāmāt* of the eye, the Sufi can be made able to see visitors before their arrival, see through barriers, see the Black Stone in Mecca during prayer, and also see angels and jinn.[179] Sight in this case is achieved through the eye of the heart.[180] Among the *karāmāt* of the ear is hearing the speech of inanimate things; and among those of the feet is walking on air.[181] In the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ʿArabī reiterates this notion and explains that the people of unveiling receive skills to affect the world with the aid of divine revelation through a disposition referred to as *al-himma l-muʾaṯṯira*, which is the active transformative desire or resolve that exposes what lies behind the veil of nature.[182] The effect of this desire on the natural world is referred to as *tasḫīr*, meaning subjugation. This is verified in the Qurʾān where we read, "And He has subjugated to you what is in the heavens and what is on earth—all is from Him."[183] Ibn ʿArabī asserts, "Whoever is closest to God subjugates whomever is furthest from God."[184]

We have seen above that al-Ġazālī veers away from any operational aspect of bāṭinism, though he states that *karāmāt* can *passively* occur as a result of unveiling and manifestation.[185] However, when it comes to magic he is opprobrious. He categorises "sorcery (*siḥr*) and talismans" as reprehensible knowledge

176 *Id., Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm*, p. 16-18.
177 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
178 *Ibid.*, p. 75, 88.
179 *Ibid.*, p. 58-59.
180 *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.
181 *Ibid.*, p. 64, 69, 113.
182 *Id., Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 89, 127-128, 183, 193-194.
183 *Ibid.*; Kor 45, 13.
184 *Id., Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 198.
185 Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 34.

(*ʿilm maḏmūm*), causing only harm. He seems to be referring to astral magic which he defines as

> a kind [of knowledge] that utilizes the occult properties (*ḫawāṣṣ*) of substances and mathematical matters related to the risings of the stars. A figure is made out of these substances in the form of the cursed person. It is allotted a specific moment according to the risings [of the stars]. With it are associated uttered words which constitute apostasy (*kufr*) and obscenity (*faḥš*) against religious law, and through which demonic aid is received.[186]

The "science of the stars" (*ʿilm al-nuǧūm*) in itself is not reprehensible, particularly astronomy; however, astrology is because it requires believing that "the planets are influential, and that they are controlling gods since they are celestial and noble substances, having a great hold on [human] hearts. And so, the heart pays attention to them and observes the good and evil from them, in avoidance or in anticipation. Thus, remembrance of the Exalted God is erased from the heart". He adds that "the attention of most people is focused on low approximate causes. They are disconnected from the path of ascent (*taraqqī*) to the Causer of Causes."[187] Al-Ġazālī censures the star-centric worldview that we observe in the works of natural philosophers, astrologers, and magicians of the earlier centuries of the Islamic middle period, including Abū Maʿšar, al-Kindī, and Maslama l-Qurṭubī, even Ibn Sīnā.

One of al-Ġazālī's critiques against magic is that it invests too much faith in the power of the *ḫawāṣṣ*. He wonders how can anyone observe the *ḫawāṣṣ* of a magic square and other magical things, and yet overlook the power of prophecy and even the spiritual power of religious obligations such as prayer.[188] Concerning letters, in the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* al-Ġazālī criticises those who take *taʾwīl* (interpretation) too far and attribute to the *fawātiḥ*, for example, meanings that do not conform to any *ẓāhir* meaning. He sees in the science of letters a deviation within revelatory bāṭinism because it is not *musnad,* that is, referable to any known strong prophetic tradition, but arrived at by "opinion" (*raʾy*).[189] In a section concerning the harmful behaviours of common people, he condemns their occupation with the nature of Divine attributes and letters,

186 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

188 Constant Hamès, "Entre recette magique et prière islamique," *Fétiches II: Puissance des objets, charme des mots, Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire*, 12 (1993), p. 191-193.

189 Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 1, p. 407.

because it is a "mysterious knowledge" that they cannot obtain, but in their doomed attempt to do so risk committing apostasy.[190]

At the same time, for Ibn ʿArabī it is through the letters that one is able to know the human essence, the universe, and ultimately God. Extraordinary feats and *tasḫīr* (subjugation) are gifts that are bestowed upon the person who has experiential knowledge of the letters and Divine Names.

This idea takes us to the operational and "magical" realm of revelatory bāṭinism. For al-Ġazālī bāṭinism involves the "resignation of the senses" in order to let the inner faculties receive truths from *ʿālam al-malakūt*, the spiritual world that mediates between the physical and the Divine realms. Ibn ʿArabī goes beyond this to assert that "the men of *bāṭin* are those who can *act upon* the realm of the unknown (*ʿālam al-ġayb*) and the *malakūt*, and they draw down the higher souls with their resolution to [achieve] what they wish, and I mean the souls of the planets and not the souls of the angels […]. The souls of the planets are drawn down by names and suffumigations." He adds that this invocation is not a corporeal one but is achieved through the planets' rays which have secret effects. He distinguishes them from the men of *ẓāhir* who have control over the created universe, the men of *ḥadd* who have control over "the realm of the fiery spirits," a realm between heaven and hell (*barzaḫ*) belonging to the spiritual world of *ǧabarūt*, and the men of *maṭlaʿ* who have control over the Divine Names. These men, namely those of *bāṭin*, *ḥadd*, and *maṭlaʿ*, have control over whatever God wills. It must be remembered these men are *ʿārifūn* (gnostics), unlike the men of *ẓāhir* (to which Maslama l-Qurṭubī and the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ would belong according to Ibn ʿArabī).[191] In the works of Ibn ʿArabī we encounter an operative aspect to revelatory bāṭinism which is conspicuously lacking in those of al-Ġazālī.

5 Lettrist Magic

The ultimate expression of magical operations founded upon the science of letters and revelatory bāṭinism is found in the works of Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Yūsuf al-Būnī (d. *ca* 622/1225 or 630/1232-1233).[192] Unfortunately not much is known about al-Būnī's life but evidence suggests that he was Ifrīqiyan

190 *Ibid.*, III, p. 210-211.

191 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, I, p. 284-286.

192 It is widely accepted that al-Būnī died in 622/1225, though Noah Gardiner's study of the transmission of his texts and analysis of paratexts establishes that he flourished in Cairo in the year 622/1225; see Noah Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge? Notes on the Production,

and sought instruction by Sufi masters.[193] He had a reputation as a worker of miracles whose prayers were always answered, and was considered by some as a saint.[194] He wrote several treatises on the occult science of letters which correlates Arabic *abǧad* letters with the emanative hierarchy of the universe influenced by Sahl al-Tustarī and Ibn Masarra.[195] The mastery of these letters benefits the operator spiritually and also magically. The circulation and influence of his works were first restricted to Sufi disciples and closed auditions. By the eighth/fourteenth century they became better known outside these circles and from there grew in popularity.[196] However, the fame of al-Būnī today rests on the popular printed editions of a work known as *Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā* (*The Sun of Knowledge, Larger Version*), which is actually a compilation of Būnian occult practices produced in the eleventh/seventeenth century. Nevertheless, it has made him one of the most recognized authors on magic and the science of letters in the Islamic world to this day.[197]

Constant Hamès has demonstrated the link between the occult thought of al-Būnī and the esoteric thought of al-Ġazālī, arguing that the former, though deeply influenced by *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, subverts the bāṭinism of the latter by his explicitly operational science of letters and *tasḫīr* practices.[198] As Jean-Charles Coulon shows, the author of *Šams al-maʿārif* was indebted more to al-Qušayrī's epistle on Sufism, one of the sources of the *Iḥyāʾ*.[199] As that may be, al-Būnī systematised Islamic lettrist magic, as we shall see, by buttressing his practices and theory on heart-oriented revelatory bāṭinism—reminiscent

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Transmission, and Reception of the Major Works of Aḥmad al-Būnī," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 12 (2012), p. 89.

193 Ifrīqiyā refers to the area that comprises Tunisia, western Libya and eastern Algeria; Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge," p. 86-88; *id., Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad al-Būnī and His readers through the Mamlūk Period*, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2014, p. 75; Edgar W. Francis, IV, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Būnī* (*d. 622/1225*), PhD dissertation, Los Angeles, 2005, p. 97-99.

194 Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," p. 92; Francis, "Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals," p. 98-99.

195 Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," p. 98-99.

196 Gardiner, *Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*, p. 75-76, 88-91.

197 Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge?," p. 102; *id., Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*, p. 6, 20, 27-30; Coulon, *La magie islamique*, I, p. 480-484.

198 Constant Hamès, "La *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* : son époque, sa postérité en terre d'islam," in *Images et magie: Picatrix entre Orient et Occident*, eds Jean-Patrice Boudet, Anna Caiozzo and Nicolas Weill-Parot, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2011, p. 228; Hamès, "Entre recette magique," p. 195-200.

199 Coulon, *La magie islamique*, I, p. 810-821.

of al-Ġazālī's ideas on the internalisation of revelatory and intellectual knowledge—as opposed to a mind-oriented intellectual bāṭinism. On the other hand, Toufic Fahd perceives Neoplatonic emanationist universal structure and the condition of attaining illumination to enable the operator to interpret the signs and ultimately their utilisation as unifying themes in the magic of al-Qurṭubī and that of al-Būnī alike.[200] Fahd also notes that one finds in al-Būnī's works the culmination of the idea that magic is itself the ultimate expression of wisdom and a demonstration of God's glory, which he shares with al-Qurṭubī.[201] Indeed, these are common concerns; however, the epistemological foundations of astral magic in the *Ġāya* and the lettrist practices in the Būnian corpus are markedly different, which is reflected in their magical vocabulary and elements of practice. For example, the star-centric aspiration of the *Ġāya* requires the operator to have deep knowledge of astrology (both technique and interpretation), whereas the God-centric aspiration of the Būnian operator requires that revelatory knowledge be attained through Sufi training. The signs to be interpreted by the former are natural tokens which include planetary configurations and natural sympathetic relationships; but the signs noted by the latter are the letters and Divine Names which are essentially non-sensory divine principles.

Al-Būnī's orientation is not surprising considering that he received Sufi training under the *šayḫ* Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Bakr al-Qurašī l-Mahdawī, the head of a centre for Sufi instruction in Tunis, who also was Ibn ʿArabī's teacher.[202] It has been noted by some scholars that al-Būnī transgresses Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine by advocating the utilisation of the occult properties of letters.[203] Indeed, Ibn ʿArabī, like al-Ġazālī, warns that the science of letters in the hands of the public is likely to be misunderstood; without a deep understanding thereof through gnosis, common people risk their religiosity.[204] Furthermore, Ibn ʿArabī specifically condemns the use of letters for transitive effects rather than the soul's divinisation. In this case, such lettrist practice is called *sīmiyā'*. According to Ibn ʿArabī, this is the knowledge of letters and names that have power over the senses of the observer, causing illusions without any essential transformations. It is a kind of *siḥr* practiced by the same

200 Toufic Fahd, "La magie comme 'source de la sagesse' d'après l'œuvre d'al-Būnī," in *Charmes et sortilèges, magie et magiciens*, ed. Rika Gyselen, Bures-sur-Yvette, Groupe pour l'étude de la civilisation du Moyen-Orient ("Res Orientales", 14), 2002, p. 61.

201 Fahd, "La magie," p. 105-106.

202 Gardiner, *Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*, p. 82; *id.*, "Forbidden Knowledge?," p. 87-88.

203 *Id., Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*, p. 79.

204 *Ibid.*, p. 79-81.

magicians who demonstrated their powers to Moses. However, the true lettrist is a *ʿārif*, acting as God's deputy (*nāʾib*) with his command (*taṣarruf*) that generates new essences, or, as Ibn ʿArabī says, "producing beings" (*īǧād kawāʾin*). We have seen that for Ibn ʿArabī in his *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm* the heart of the *ʿārif* performs the creative fiat "Be! And so it is".[205] Therefore, the legitimacy of the operative aspect of the science of letters is conditioned by the aim and experience of *kašf*.

Ibn Ḫaldūn in his attack on magic equates *sīmiyāʾ* with talismanry, both being mundane practices. In the *Ġāya*, similarly, astral/natural magic, as the practical upshot of wisdom, is referred to as *sīmiyāʾ*.[206] However, Ibn Ḫaldūn contends that this *sīmiyāʾ* was also practiced by "the people of command (*taṣarruf*) among the Sufis" who exaggerated their desire to achieve extraordinary things in the world of the elements.[207] *Sīmiyāʾ* is achieved when "the lettrist abandons acquaintance with the secrets of God and the truths of creation which are the results of witnessing and unveiling, and restricts himself to the names and the properties of letters and words."[208] In one condemning stroke he includes as its masters both Ibn ʿArabī and al-Būnī.[209]

Later, the uses to which *sīmiyāʾ* was put came to be associated with trickery and prestidigitation. Ḥāǧǧī Ḫalīfa (d. 1067/1657) defines *sīmiyāʾ* more as prestidigitation: "Know that this term can be applied to that which is not real in magic, which is a well-known [art]; essentially, [it is] causing imagined spectrums in the air, which are not actually experienced by the senses. Then, some forms appear in the substance of the air and dissipate quickly due to the rapidity in which the substance of the air changes [...]. As for how these forms happen and their causes, this is a hidden matter, of which only its adepts are cognisant."[210] Within the context of revelatory bāṭinism, then, *sīmiyāʾ* acquired negative connotations—namely, it was associated with illusionism and mundane magical practices such as talismans.

In their studies of the science of letters generally and al-Būnī specifically, a number of scholars have inaccurately used *sīmiyāʾ* interchangeably with *ʿilm*

205 Ibn ʿArabī, *Mawaqiʿ al-nuǧūm*, p. 121.

206 Al-Qurṭubī, *Picatrix*, p. 2.

207 Ibn Ḫaldūn, *Muqaddima*, p. 488.

208 *Ibid.*, p. 490.

209 *Ibid.*, p. 488.

210 Ḥāǧǧī Ḫalīfa, *Kašf al-ẓunūn ʿan asmāʾ al-kutub wa-l-funūn*, Beirut, n.d., II, p. 1020.

al-ḥurūf (science of letters).[211] In a text falsely attributed to al-Būnī known as *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif* (*The Sun of Knowledge and the Secrets of Gnosis*)—which formed the basis of *al-Kubrā* (*The Larger Version*)—[212], we read that the secrets of the letters and their instrumentalisation depend on "the emancipation of the soul from its [physical] attachment, and [it is] the special path on which the gnostics—people of knowledge—march toward the emancipation of the soul from the sensory world and its purification from the lowliness of natural matters. And they are assigned to some of them but not to others; they protect it, conceal it, and express it with symbols." Such extraordinary skills are achieved "without difficulty and inconvenience" and, most of all, "without any kind of tricks." Furthermore, those who hope to achieve such supernatural effects without bothering to purify their souls achieve only "*sīmiyā'* and corruption on earth."[213] So, clearly, the author aligns the content of his work with *tasḫīr* and distances it from the illusory and mundane *sīmiyā'*. His practices are conditioned on the purification and elevation of the operator's soul, by means of revelation and *kašf*, as only then does lettrist magic become the licit prerogative of the enlightened operator.

The close link between Būnian practices and revelatory bāṭinism is best represented in two authentic Būnian texts: *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt* (*The Subtleties of Signs*) and *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn* (*Guidance for Seekers*). The first is a widely copied text which is concerned mainly with cosmogenesis and lettrist cosmology. Therein the created celestial spheres, mundane spheres, and their revolutions are actualised and maintained through letters. The emergence of these spheres results from a stratified divine volitional power: two realms of Invention (*ibdāʿ*) and two realms of Creation (*iḫtirāʿ*). The first realm of invention, the most sublime, contains letter secrets, and has command over destiny; each realm below particularises and variegates the course of the created universe. In addition,

211 See *e.g.* Jean-Charles Coulon, "Building al-Būnī's Legend: The Figure of al-Būnī through ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Biṣṭāmī's *Shams al-āfāq*," *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 5/1 (2016), p. 1-26; Lory, *La science des lettres en Islam*, p. 37; Lory, "Magie et religion," p. 7.

212 This text contains anachronisms which could possibly be interpolations by students, as well as material transferred verbatim from other authentic texts, particularly from the *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*; see Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge," p. 6, 20, 27-30, 96, 102-103; Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge," p. 102; Coulon, *La magie islamique*, I, p. 480-484. The authenticity of *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif* has been the subject of debate in the theses of Gardiner and Coulon. However, both *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif* and the later compilation (*Šams al-maʿārif al-kubrā*) are more widely copied and printed, and also most recognizable and influential even on a popular level, and thus they both warrant exploration as texts representative of the ideas and practices discussed in this article.

213 (Pseudo-)al-Būnī, *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2647, ff. 80v-81r.

each realm is infixed with letters, reflected in the constitution of human beings.[214]

The first creation is the cloud from which the macrocosmic Adam is created; the second creation is the primordial dust. Alternatively, the first invention is the plane of particles and the second invention is the plane of composition. This can be viewed as a soteriological map, and here al-Būnī employs the notion of the subtle powers of the heart, soul, and intellect that we find in al-Ġazālī, who deliberately abstains from explicating their subtle dimensions. Al-Būnī explains that through the "subtle powers" (*laṭāʾif*) of the intellect through which one cultivates of the knowledge of the infixed letters, the first creation is revealed (macrocosmic truth of man). Through the subtle powers of the spirit, the second creation is revealed. With the subtle powers of the soul, the first invention is revealed; and, finally, through the subtle powers of the heart the second invention is revealed.[215] The following table demonstrates the hierarchy of these epistemological and soteriological pursuits:

First Invention	Soul
Second Invention	Heart
First Creation	Intellect
Second Creation	Spirit

The first invention is the most sublime as it contains letter secrets; therefore, knowledge of it ultimately endows the gnostic with *taṣarruf*, "the ability to act [on creation]." God "made the letters with meanings for the intellect, subtleties for the spirit, images for the soul, and emanations for the heart."[216] The heart is where God deposits the secrets of the letters and thus it holds a high place in this hierarchy of illuminations.[217] It receives revelations through "realisation" (*fahm*) which happens "through God" unlike *tafsīr* (exoteric interpretation of phenomena or text) and *raʾy* (interpretation through opinion). *Taʾwīl* (interpretation of hidden meaning) is one degree below *fahm* and it is an intellectual understanding that is guided by God, whereas *fahm* is an interpretation by direct divine inspiration (*ilhām*) and an exclusive gift from God to his Friends who are *ūlū l-albāb* (people possessed of innermost hearts).[218] According to

214 Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2658, f. 5v.

215 *Ibid.*, ff. 5v-6r; Gardiner, "Esotericism in a manuscript culture," p. 192-194.

216 Al-Būnī *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2658, f. 6r.

217 *Ibid.*, f. 10v.

218 *Ibid.*, f. 5v.

this schema, *fahm* is achieved by the heart which in turn illuminates the soul and brings about *kašf*. This is achieved by the people of *bāṭin* or "witnesses to the truth."[219]

In the *Šams al-maʿārif*, the mystical anatomy of the heart is expanded, and as we saw with al-Ġazālī, al-Tirmiḏī, and Ibn ʿArabī, it is associated with the three levels of belief. The heart is divided into three chambers (*taǧwīfāt*). The uppermost is the locus of *islām* (surrender), and as it contains the rational power, it comprehends the dictates of the will that originate in the soul (*nafs*). In this chamber, the esoteric significance of letters is received. The second chamber is the locus of imagination, originating in the spirit (*rūḥ*), whereby "the verities of the spiritual realm, the higher secrets of divine power, and the scales of verities are apprehended. It is the location of the lights of bestowments and higher secrets." The third chamber is the locus of the kindling heart (*fuʾād*) and faith (*īmān*), and it receives more secrets and subtle truths. Each chamber has an "eye," meaning that it has the potential to achieve a certain level of insight. For example, the Eye of Light in the first chamber enables *tasḫīr* and reveals "the secrets of *sensibilia*, the evolution of composites, the verities of letters, their secrets, and the greatness of what God the Exalted has placed in it [pertaining to] the secrets of the names and the verities of His knowledge."[220]

Another systematic affirmation of the revelatory reception of the secrets of the letters and their instrumentalisation is found in al-Būnī's *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*.[221] There the author delineates the waystations of the Sufi path: submission (*islām*), faith (*īmān*), perfection (*iḥsān*), and intimacy (*qurb*), the last corresponding to al-Tirmiḏī's notion of "emancipation" localized in the heart's core (*lubb*). A specific set of "habits" (*sulūk*, lit. "wayfaring") is associated with each waystation, together with doors (*abwāb*) or consequences and signs (*ʿalāmāt*). The signs often include extraordinary skills received as a result of observing certain practices. For example, under the habit of penitence (*tawba*) in the waystation of *islām* undertaken by the "wayfarers" (*sālikīn*), one of the signs of perfecting the act of silence privately and publicly is the ability to extract secrets from individuals.[222] Under the habit of penitence in the waystation of *islām* undertaken by the "adherents" (*murīdīn*), one of the signs of perfecting the act of abandoning the company of quarrelsome people is

219 *Ibid.*, f. 4v.

220 (Pseudo-)al-Būnī, *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2647, p. 14; Coulon, *La magie islamique*, I, p. 731-735; Lory, *La science des lettres en islam*, p. 105.

221 Gardiner, *Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture*, p. 22; Coulon, *La magie islamique*, I, p. 477.

222 Al-Būnī, *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, MS Istanbul Süleymaniye, Ayasofya 2160, ff. 3v-5r.

the ability to find solace with inanimate things by hearing their prayers, their speech, and their secrets.[223] In the waystation of *īmān* (faith), adherents receive the secret of every verse/sign (*āya*) and are granted esoteric knowledge as a result of strictly observing the Law (*šarʿ*) externally and internally. Other signs include control over nature and the world of spirits (*tasḫīr*) and hearing their speech,[224] obtaining the secrets of letters and Divine Names,[225] and "penetrating air" (*i.e.* levitation or flight).[226]

Therefore, these acts are symptomatic of the initiate's success in completing a stage towards enlightenment. Ultimately, the aim is to experience the quiddities of things by means of revelation rather than intellection. In the waystation of *īmān*, the act of reciting the affirmation "There is no god but God" results in "the emergence of states, actions, and speech on the honest scale and the true path whereby beings present the verities of their primordial states without a sign for representation or a gesture of modification."[227]

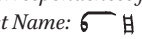
Tasḫīr and extraordinary acts are the ability to utilise and take advantage of the manifestation of these quiddities. In *Hidāyat al-qāṣidīn*, the term "suns of gnosis" (*šumūs al-maʿārif*) is used to describe the esoteric knowledge bestowed upon an individual in a specific waystation;[228] elsewhere, it describes those who "utter on behalf of God what God wills. By the dismantling of their will, God's will appear instead," referring to those who achieve realization (*fahm*) in the sense we saw in *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*.[229] To al-Būnī, thus, extraordinary acts become the prerogative of Sufis. As we have seen, Ibn ʿArabī elaborates on these waystations—or grades (*marātib*)—of *islām, īmān*, and *iḥsān* in his *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm*. He asserts that individuals are bestowed with various "miracles" or "charismas" (*karāmāt*) as they journey through these grades.[230] The term *karāmāt* is also used by al-Būnī to describe the talents received by the gnostic.[231]

Unlike talismanry, *karāmāt* or extraordinary skills are passively received without recourse to any natural operations. To al-Būnī this involves the attraction of the power of *rūḥāniyyāt*; no deep knowledge of celestial or natural

223 *Ibid.*, f. 6v.
224 *Ibid.*, ff. 15r-16r.
225 *Ibid.*, f. 14r.
226 *Ibid.*, f. 24v.
227 *Ibid.*, f. 13v.
228 *Ibid.*, f. 15r.
229 *Ibid.*, f. 29r.
230 Ibn ʿArabī, *Mawāqiʿ al-nuǧūm*, p. 16-18.
231 *Ibid.*, p. 34-50.

causes is required. Unlike the astral magic of the *Ġāya*, the effects of subjugation (*tasḫīr*), including that of spirits, is subjective—even if some of its effects seem transitive—and conditioned by the subjugator's gnostic disposition and actions. These acts of purification are not merely preparatory or means to a specific goal, as we see in the astral magic of the *Ġāya*, the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, and the *Sirr al-asrār*; they are the whole focus of the gnostic's endeavour to reach a state of unveiling and complete divinisation of the soul.

In the *Šams al-maʿārif* and al-Būnī's *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*, the celestial *rūḥāniyyāt* of the prophets are absent. In comparison to the *rūḥāniyyāt* of the *Ġāya* and the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, they are no longer powers of a single ontological origin, *i.e.* the celestial world, but rather intelligent beings emerging from inaccessible mysterious dimensions (*ġayb*) while still being associated to the celestial spheres. Al-Būnī often speaks of angels, *rūḥāniyyāt*, as "helpers" (*aʿwān*) or "servants" (*ḫuddām*) that rule over certain days, planets, Divine Names, letters, verses of the Qurʾān, and lunar mansions.

TABLE 2 *From* Šams al-maʿārif*: three examples of correspondences for the seven characters that constitute the symbol of God's Greatest Name:*  [232]

Letter	Sphere	Character	Day	Spirit	Minister	Divine Name	Purpose
F	Sun		Sunday	Ruqyāʾīl	Muḍhab	Fard (Singular)	Silencing kings and other elites
Ǧ	Moon		Monday	Ǧibrīl	Murra	Ǧabbār (Compeller)	Everlasting harmony, healing the diseases of the Sun
Š	Mars		Tuesday	Simsāʾīl	al-Aḥmar	Šahīd (Witness)	Victory, discord, causing hot illnesses and bleeding

232 (Pseudo-)al-Būnī, *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2647, f. 58r.

TABLE 3 *From* Šams al-maʿārif*: three examples from a list of correspondences for the verses of* sūrat al-Fātiḥa[233]

Verse	Day	Rūḥāniyya	Planet	Divine Name	Angels of the ʿArš
al-ḥamdu li-Llāh rabb al-ʿālamīn	Sunday	Ruqyāʾīl	Sun	al-Ḥayy (The Everlasting), al-Qayyūm (The Subsisting)	Abǧd
iyyāka naʿbudu wa-iyyāka nastaʿīn	Monday	Ǧibrāʾīl	Moon	al-Sarīʿ (The Fast), al-Qarīb (The Near)	Mnṣ
ġayr al-maġḍūb ʿalayhim wa-lā l-ḍāllīn	Tuesday	Simsāʾīl	Mars	al-Qādir (The Omnipotent)	Ġẓʿš

TABLE 4 *From* Laṭāʾif al-išārāt *and* Šams al-maʿārif*: three examples of correspondences for the lunar mansions*[234]

Mansion	Letter	*Rūḥāniyya*	Effect
Šaraṭayn[a]	A	*Rūḥāniyya* of anger	Constriction[b]
Buṭayn	B	*Rūḥāniyya* that assuages anger	Healing (good time to take medicines)
Ṯurayyā	Ǧ	Temperate *rūḥāniyya*	Good time to travel

a In *Šams al-maʿārif,* the name of the first lunar mansion listed is as *al-Naṭḥ*.

b In *Šams al-maʿārif*, an aggressive operation is provided to cause stress, anger, and bad luck; (pseudo-)al-Būnī, *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2647, f. 14r-v.

233 *Ibid.*, ff. 53r-55r.

234 Al-Būnī, *Laṭāʾif al-išārāt*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2658, ff. 25v-28v; (pseudo-)al-Būnī, *Šams al-maʿārif wa-laṭāʾif al-ʿawārif*, MS Paris, BnF, Arabe 2647, ff. 13v-17v.

The letters themselves are the essential principles of the spheres, their rotations, emanations, and the *rūḥāniyyāt*.[235] Thus it is only through mastery of the letters that the operator can attract the powers of the *rūḥāniyyāt* and the higher world.[236] For al-Būnī, the ability to utilize these spiritual powers is one of the "great effects of the soul's emancipation" which intensifies the "great force a person finds in his own soul"—the *himma*—"whereby taking charge of the world of creation" is achieved.[237] Moreover, al-Būnī explains that the link between the different corresponding components is due to emanations (*inbiʿāṯ*) that create a web of sympathies motivating "the inclinations between jinn, human beings, and animals; each form [is inclined] towards [that which has] its [same] form"; this is a manifestation of God's mercy (*raḥma*), as it is through the knowledge—revelatory and hermeneutic—of these correspondences that one is able to ascend to the Divine.[238] In the earlier magical tradition to which the *Ġāya* belongs, this sympathetic connection is explained by the theory of astral causation according to which generated things/effects—ontologically inferior—receive their forms from the celestial bodies/causes and thus have a generative connection. For al-Būnī, by contrast, sympathy connects all created things, which are envisaged as ontologically equal, being produced spontaneously by Divine effusion.

As a consequence of his Sufi mindset, al-Būnī conceives of letters and names as the fundamentals of divine truth, constituting the Divine speech whose syntax can only be uncovered through unveiling and revelation; this allows the operator to encapsulate its power through spoken and written speech due to the unique human potential for divinisation as conceptualised by Ibn Masarra and pseudo-Tustarī's *Risālat al-Ḥurūf*,[239] this in contrast to Ǧabir b. Ḥayyān and Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ, for example, according to whom they are principles of natural and metaphysical realities. Thus, al-Būnī enunciates the operational aspects of revelatory bāṭinism that al-Ġazālī and Ibn ʿArabī decline to express. Al-Ġazālī's orthopraxy and his desire to protect *šarʿ* (religious law) prevents him from divulging realisations received through unveiling (*mukāšafa*); these include cosmogenical and cosmological matters, spiritual hierarchies, and letter correspondences, which Ibn ʿArabī discusses more freely. However, al-Būnī fully articulates unveiled truths and their operational value; therefore, in his works

235 Gril, "La science des lettres," p. 387.

236 Lory, *La science des lettres*, p. 30.

237 Al-Būnī, *Šams al-maʿārif*, f. 83r, f. 84v.

238 *Ibid.*, f. 50r.

239 Lory, "La magie des lettres," p. 99-101; Gril, "La science des lettres," p. 385, 387, 423, 427-429.

we find the culmination of the instrumentalisation of letters, mystically and magically.

Conclusion

The translation movement that took place under the Abbasids made available Greek knowledge, from natural philosophy to military science. It also fostered original scientific and philosophical achievements. As part of this enthusiasm, magic in early medieval Islam was incorporated into scientific inquiry due to the efforts of astrologers and occultists who proposed natural explanations for the principles of their practice. The *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, the *Sirr al-asrār*, and the *Rasā'il* of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' belong to a tradition that drew its metaphysical and epistemological foundations primarily from the theories of astral influences developed by Abū Maʿšar and al-Kindī. These theories themselves were derived and synthesized from Hellenic natural philosophy, particularly the natural corpus of Aristotle reconciled with Neoplatonic elements that supported a volitional causality. As a result, magic was construed as a practice of natural philosophy. The magical efficacy of talismans, amulets, and other devices was predicated on the operator's knowledge of the causal and semiological links between the terrestrial and celestial worlds and the sympathies that result among generated things.

By the seventh/thirteenth century, Sufism was establishing its theoretical and technical underpinnings and the social ratification of its hierarchal system.[240] We can now discern an epistemological shift in Islamic occult thought from magical theories drawn from natural philosophy to foundations drawn from Sufi doctrines. The "hidden" (*bāṭin*) in magic is no longer the *ḫawāṣṣ* (occult properties) of natural things (minerals, plants, and animals), but the powers of subtle levels of reality (*laṭā'if*), whether as cosmic principles (letters and Divine Names) or as inner human faculties (heart, soul, spirit, and intellect) that can only be understood through abstraction guided by revelation. Lettrist occult practices and *tasḫīr*, as represented by al-Būnī in particular, drew their cosmological and epistemological framework from a Sufi worldview that superimposed Islamic concepts upon a newly-accentuated Neoplatonic emanationism.[241] Awareness of the Divine and the perception of the entirety of the cosmos as God's shadow shuns logical deductions of causes—an intellectual engagement—and instead exhorts the adept to engage in soul-immersive

240 Melchert, "Origins," p. 16.

241 Lory, "La magie des lettres," p. 100-102.

exercises that result in revelations—localised in the heart—about the verities of the higher and lower worlds. "Magic," understood as the human manipulation of exterior and interior phenomena—both transitive and subjective, without these qualities being mutually exclusive—was reconceptualised in Sufi terms as an incidental ability passively received by the human subject in a heightened and active state attentive solely to God. The astral magic of early medieval Islam worked with nature; the *tasḫīr* and *karāmāt* of the later period worked beyond it.